

# Observations on the Banjo and Banjo Playing.

By S. S. STEWART.

There are a great many books published on the Banjo and in use by the public—many of which contain a number of scales and exercises for the Banjo—but all more or less deficient in explanatory lessons, by which the student can go at the practice of his scales and exercises understandingly.

The fingering of the left-hand in banjo playing is important, and a right application in this direction is very necessary. The same may be said of the manipulation of the strings with the right-hand; or in other words, without a good execution and a proper application of the right-hand, one can not acquire the act of banjo playing; for in "playing on the Banjo" the use of the hands and fingers is required to such an extent as to act in unison with the mind. The mind must be concentrated upon the subject in hand and the hands must be ready to act in unison with the mind, as the implements of thought.

To this end a certain knowledge and practice is necessary—knowledge of the proper manner of setting to work—and then the practice that gives the power to the hands to express on the musical instrument the musical sounds as conveyed to the mind through the musical notation.

There are some who are good theorists in banjo playing, but who can not execute well, or put their theories into practice. There are others, almost without theory, who can execute to a certain extent—and indeed many of whom would pass for skilled performers when playing for persons unfamiliar with all kinds of banjo playing—were it not that some bad fault is constantly showing itself in their performances. The writer, coming constantly into contact, as he does, with very many banjo players, has had constant opportunity to observe and note defects as well as many excellent points in the work of many performers.

Some have been met with who while quite good executants, were at a loss to explain any thing they performed, and if asked to go over certain passages more slowly, in order that the same might be analyzed, they at once became lost, as it were, in a great fog, and hopelessly befuddled, in fact unable to execute the passages twice in the same way.

Again, there are performers of no doubt excellent ability *as performers* on the Banjo—but who as teachers, or in the capacity of writers on the Banjo, are hopelessly at sea. They can not put any thing on paper in a manner that will render it intelligible to a student, and when such persons attempt to produce instruction books, such works often prove so utterly un-clear and so discouraging to the student that he gives up the study. Such cases are legion.

Quite recently the writer received a circular from a banjo teacher, in which a work for the Banjo was advertised

the contents, than which, scarcely any thing could have been more preposterous. It professed to teach the Banjo in three different ways—one by musical notation, as accepted by all enlightened banjoists,—another system called the English method, and still another, termed the "Simple Method,"—the latter named being the old "Simple Simon" newly served up.

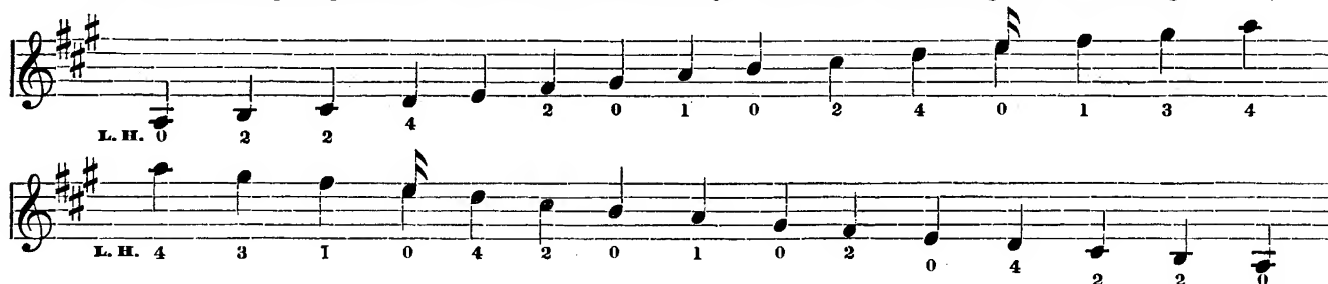
One is apt to inquire after reading such advertisements, or after perusing briefly such works, as to whether their reputed authors can execute from any of the methods, of which they give so unsavory a mixture.

Too much importance can hardly be given to the practice of the scales on the Banjo. Not that it is necessary to practice thoroughly all the scales in the twelve major and twelve minor keys. But in those keys in which the performer wishes to play selections, the value of practice of the scales can hardly be over-estimated.

In practicing the "Natural Scale" of the Banjo, or Gamut in A Major, the left hand fingering, both in ascending and descending the scale, is the same; and is not likely to be improved upon. In the following scale the proper fingering of the left hand is placed under each of the notes. The hand should be allowed to shift its position after making the second note in the scale (B), as is indicated by the figures under B and C. The second finger is used to stop the bass string to make each of those notes and then the little finger falls in place at the 5th fret, for the note D. The short string of the Banjo—the nut of which should be directly at the 5th fret—is generally indicated, in musical notation of banjo music, by a double stem, or sometimes by a cross (x). The double stem is rather better, on account of the cross (x) being also used to denote the thumb of right hand. The note represented in music as E for the "5th string open," may also be made on the first string at the 5th fret; and for this reason, the first and fifth strings should be of the same thickness and quality and the nut for the fifth string should be directly at the 5th fret. It was unusual some time ago to finger the fifth string, at all, with the left hand; but it is at the present time coming more and more into use on account of the varied effects that are producible by its use in connection with the first string.

As the note E—the fifth string—is being made in the scale, the left hand shifts, so that the first finger of that hand falls upon the first string at the 7th fret, making the note F $\sharp$ ; the third finger then falls readily upon the string at the 9th fret, where the note G $\sharp$  is found; and the two octaves of the scale are completed by the little finger falling upon A, at the 10th fret.

The left hand fingering of the "Natural scale of the Banjo" is the same ascending and descending.



Having spoken of the *left hand* fingering it will now be in place to say something about the best modes of picking the strings with the fingers of the *right hand*.

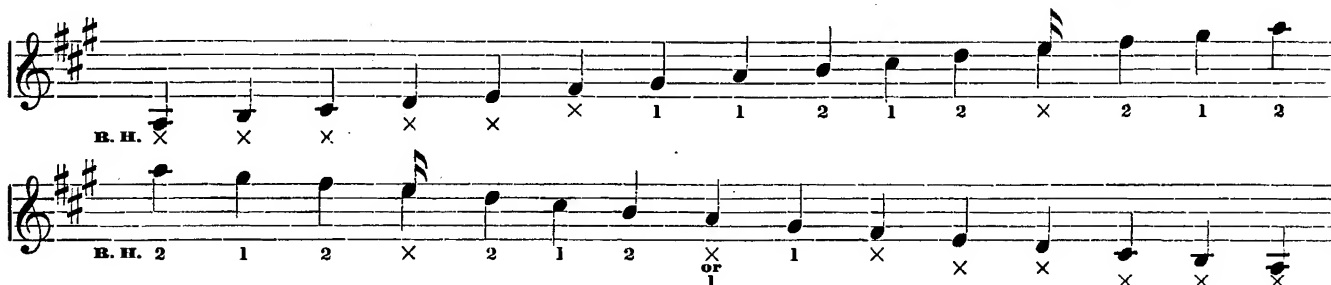
In the beginning of the practice of the scales it is sufficient for the pupil to use the thumb, as a general rule, for the third, fourth and fifth strings,—picking the second string with the first finger, and the first string with the second finger. After some degree of skill has been acquired in this way practice may be begun in using the three fingers of the right hand and picking the first string with the third finger, the second string with the second finger and the third string with the first finger. Practice of this kind is a great help, as it brings the three fingers into use and supple and strengthens them.

As a general rule, for rapid execution, it is well to rest the little finger on the head and execute, by picking,

with the thumb and first and second fingers only—although there are frequently passages to be met with where it is a great help to have the third finger in use, and no absolute rule can be laid down governing always the use of the fingers.

There are some very good executants who do without the aid of the third finger at all and some who can not command the absolute control of this member even with a very great amount of practice.

The following scale is fingered for the right hand. Supposing that the student has become familiar with the left hand fingering, as denoted in the previous example, he will now proceed to bring the thumb and two fingers of the right hand into active practical use by the practice of this scale, ascending and then descending, until it is performed with precision and accuracy.



In the foregoing example the thumb, first and second fingers of the right hand only are used, but as will be observed, the second finger is not relegated to the first string absolutely—for in rapid execution alternate use of the first, second, and sometimes the third finger, upon the first string is requisite.

For instance, in a quick movement, such as the rapid performance of the scale even, it is manifestly easier after having picked a note with the first finger on the second string, to follow by making the note on the first string with the second finger, and the succeeding note on same string with the first finger. In very rapid passages the three fingers may be utilized in this way upon the first string. The thumb may also be used to pick the second

string, as well as the third, with equal facility in many passages.

We will now follow with some exercises in the key of E major,—sometimes called the "Open Key" by banjo players—using the scale of one and two octaves for the purpose.

The following Example has the fingering for the left hand only—the figures under the notes standing for the fingers of the left hand to be used in stopping the strings on the frets, 0 signifying "open string."

For right hand fingering, make use of the first and second fingers on the first string alternately.



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Now, going further, we have the same scale written in two octaves, the figures, as in the previous example, denoting the left hand fingering only:



Now follows an Exercise on the same scale arranged so that it may be practiced in accurate Time, and in this example the proper fingering of the left hand is also given, with the remark that in picking the strings with the fingers and thumb of right hand the thumb may be used for the third and fifth strings and the first and second fingers for the first and second strings, using both the first and second fingers for the quick notes on the first string. It is also desirable to bring the third finger into requisition after the exercise has been thoroughly mastered with the use of only the first two fingers.

Common Time.



As a general rule, among banjo players, the keys of A, E and D major are the favorite keys for banjo music and are the keys most in use. A, being the "Natural key of the Banjo," and corresponding with the natural key of C on the pianoforte, is more in use than any other key among banjoists; indeed it is often possible to meet with banjo performers who play a few pieces in this key, but who are entirely unfamiliar with any other.

Now this key is closely related to two other keys, namely, E major, its *dominant*, and D major, its *subdominant*, and it often happens that a comparatively simple musical composition which has its first and last strains in the key of A, carries us, not only into its "relative minor" key, but frequently into those major keys mentioned as its near relatives. Hence, even a third rate banjo player should be familiar with those keys, practicing the scales and chords.

It is not within the scope of the present observations to deal with the twenty-four major and minor scales, and keys,—as that work will be found fully laid down in the first part of "THE AMERICAN BANJO SCHOOL," the present "OBSERVATIONS" being intended more particularly to supplement that work and to furnish the student with some details and information found to be lacking in that and other works.

In the following scale of D major, the fingering of left hand is denoted; the observations on right hand fingering already given applying equally to this example. It may be well to remark that although G $\sharp$  on the third string is marked here for the little finger (fourth) of the left hand, yet if the third finger is preferred to it, there can be no objection. Those who have short fingers prefer the little finger—especially in chords.



Different banjo players of note have different methods of manipulating the strings with the fingers of the right hand in executing music in this, the Guitar style, so called; and it is an important thing for those who aspire to become performers and solo players, to practice the various methods of using the fingers of the right hand, until the manner of picking the strings best suited to each individual is arrived at.

Because one performer uses only two fingers and thumb in "picking," is no reason why an absolute rule should be laid down that his method is the only true one—for we may shortly find another who makes use of three

fingers and who renders the same music with greater ease and less "lost motion." Again we may discover a performer who makes use of only the first finger and thumb of right hand, and yet seems to have no little skill in execution.

It is not well, therefore, to follow either of the latter examples blindly, but to endeavor to train all the fingers to be of use—each in its proper place.

*The object to be attained* is the same in all cases. This object being to bring the greatest amount of musical expression from the instrument, and to do this with the least possible labor.

In order to accomplish this it is necessary for the student to become versed in the various manners of picking the strings and to philosophically consider for himself the relative value of each, not forgetting that he must consider his own particular temperament and take into consideration, to some degree at least, his physical constitution and natural musical capacity.

A rule can be safely set down that the little finger of the right hand, in picking, rests upon the Banjo-head near the bridge, and that the first and second fingers and thumb are used in nearly all picking of rapid passages. The third finger is then employed where it can best be utilized, in some passages constantly on the first string and in other passages not at all.

But no rule can be given that will absolutely govern the particular place upon the Banjo-head for the little finger to rest, (nor is it absolutely necessary in some cases to rest the finger at all); it being observed that the nearer to the bridge the strings are picked, the more acute will be the tone produced; and by moving the hand a short distance away from the bridge, the more melodious and full are the chords produced, until we have passed a certain limit, where the strings are found to be much easier to manipulate by reason of picking them farther from the notes or points of vibration (the nut and bridge—or the frets at which the left hand stops the strings, and the bridge) and then the tone produced is found to be softer and much less acute.

These varied degrees of tone possible to produce on the instrument, place within our reach the power of giving much expression to our music, and without the aid of either loud or soft pedals.



By training the musical ear and by training at the same time the hands to obey the will, and further by a just and systematic philosophical study of our instrument and its music, we can arrive at a correct judgment in musical conception and execution, and then instead of rendering only a few semi-barbarous tunes on the Banjo, we bring forth a higher class of music—proceeding thus until our favorite instrument has taken rank by the side of the harp and kindred instruments. The music is in our instrument, the Banjo, and this fact is being more and more acknowledged, as the instrument becomes known and understood.

#### THE "SNAP" AND "HAMMER SLUR."

There is some confusion among banjo players in regard to that particular style of fingering designated the

"snap," and not without good reason.

As will be explained in the following remarks, the passages intended to be executed partly with fingers of the left hand—which in the "snap" is done by pulling the string with a certain finger of this hand, instead of picking the string in the ordinary manner with a finger of the right hand—in some cases are so obscure that an inexperienced performer is puzzled, and at a loss to tell to a certainty just how the passages so marked are to be played.

In the following Example,—which is an extract from J. H. Lee's arrangement of the "Farewell Waltzes," by Lowthian,—we have an excellent illustration of the "snap," so written as to be readily confused with the slur. Now in the generality of musical notation a curved line, thus:  or , signifies a slur, or tie, and means that the notes over or under which it is placed are to be played or sung in a smooth and connected manner—in other words, the notes are to be slurred into one another and connected, as it were, without any decided accent on the separate notes. But in banjo music the same sign is used for an entirely different purpose, although sometimes it is used to designate the slur. It is quite common when writing the triplet, composed of three notes played in the time of two notes of the same kind, to place the slur over them; and it therefore becomes necessary for the banjoist to exercise his own judgment whether he will make use of the "snap" or not.

One can not always be guided entirely by the signs placed over the notes, particularly in passages so marked; for where one performer would prefer to make use of the "snap," thus utilizing both the right and left hands in execution, another performer would prefer to play the same passage entirely with the fingers of the right hand.

Although most writers on the Banjo make use of the old fashioned slur sign to denote "snapped" passages, the writer among the number; yet I am led to think that the manner of noting those passages adopted by Mr. Frank B. Converse, the well known writer, is preferable.

Mr. Converse makes use of a similar sign, curved in the opposite direction, and the figure denoting the proper finger of left hand to be used for the "snap," enclosed in the curve. I have often regretted that I did not adopt that method in my own writings, as I believe it is much less confusing.

The following is the extract from the waltz spoken of:—

#### "BASS TO B."



The foregoing may be executed without the use of the "snap" if desired, but some would prefer it, as indicated, with the snap.

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To illustrate:—The curved line around the triplet of F#, G# and F#, merely denotes that those three notes are to be played in a connected manner: the next slur mark connecting F# and E#, means that the second finger of left hand is used to “snap,”—that is, to pull the third string, while the first finger of left hand remains on the 1st fret on third string at E#. Thus, the note F# is picked with a finger of the right hand, and the following note, E#, is picked with the second finger of the left hand. The last three measures have a number of snapped notes as will readily be observed. The little finger from the note D snaps C#—the second finger snaps B—the first finger on A snaps G#, and the second finger on F# snaps E, the open third string.

The next Example is part of an old Jig by Buckley. Here we have an excellent illustration in quite a rapid

movement, of the “hammer slur,” or vibration slur, and the “snap.”

In passages such as are illustrated in the following example, the snap could scarcely be done away with. Beginning with A, the bass string open, the following note, C#, is produced by a quick slapping of the second or fourth finger of the left hand on the same string at the 4th fret. Those who possess small and weak fingers will find it no easy thing to accomplish, and after a few attempts to produce a good substantial C# with the little finger, will doubtless make another trial, this time using the second finger. Such passages require practice. Let the student try the piece over several times. The time will be found a little peculiar, but it will prove excellent practice.

All the slur marks in descending passages—like from D to B—A to G#—and F# to E, are to be snapped.



Properly speaking, slurred passages should be played in a connected manner, as has been said; whereas “snapped” passages in banjo music are to be played in directly the opposite way—in *staccato*, or a detached manner. It seems strange when we think that a sign used to represent *legato* passages, originally, should now be

used to denote its opposite, *staccato*, but such is the fact.

In some of the older music for the banjo, written several years ago, it is not unusual to find passages of which the following is an example.



It will be noticed that the third note in the example, B, has a sort of inverted bracket over it, which contains the figure 2.

The meaning of this is as follows:—The first two notes, A, are picked in the usual manner with a finger of the right hand, and the note B, the first string open, is to be sounded by pulling that string with the second finger of the left hand. I believe this way of noting music has almost entirely gone out of date. Unless the passage to be played is very rapid, such a method of

handling the strings is quite useless; the note so marked being just as easy to execute with the first, second, or third right-hand finger.

As already said, the object to be attained is to get music out of the instrument by the best methods. All who are studying the Banjo have that aim in view. The discarding of obsolete and useless methods and complications, and the goal to be reached without useless waste of time or force.



### LEFT HAND POSITIONS.

It is important that the banjo student should early in his practice acquire a proper use of the left hand, as has been previously remarked. Not only is it very necessary for him to acquire a true system of fingering for rapid "runs," up and down the scale; but also in chords, in the various keys and changes. An awkward position of the left hand, caused by an improper fingering, is always an impediment to the performer, and causes also a waste of strength that is not likely to occur when a proper use of the hand and fingers has been acquired and practiced. As it is just as easy to acquire the proper method of fingering at the start, as to proceed blindly and without method, it is strongly recommended that the pupil observe these brief remarks on "position fingering," and endeavor to apply them understandingly.

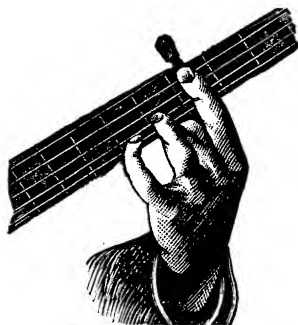
Take, for instance, the following chord of D Major, which is, of course, the subdominant chord in the key of A major.



Many performers, instead of fingering with the first, third and fourth fingers, use the first, second and third. Now, on a small Banjo, or on the Banjeaurine, that fingering will answer very well; but on a Banjo of the ordinary size the hand will not be in an easy position unless the third and fourth fingers are used (on the second and first strings) for the notes D and F#.

The following engraving is a fair representation of the position of the left hand in making this chord.

The first finger makes the barré at 5th fret, producing D and A, on the fourth and third strings; then the third finger stops the second string at the 6th fret for the octave D, and the highest note, which is F#, is produced on the first string at the 7th fret, with the little finger.



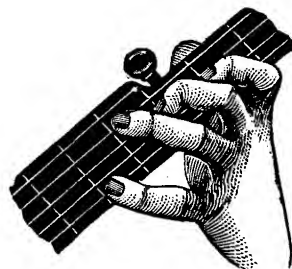
It will be found that this is a much easier position for the hand than the position spoken of, where the little finger is not used.

Again, where a change in fingering is necessitated, such as changing from that chord to the following, a *diminished seventh*,—it is much easier to change when the fingers are used as above recommended.



This change of fingering is frequently rendered necessary in playing in the "natural key of the Banjo," and in using the fingers as indicated here the little finger can remain on the first string at the 7th fret, making the note F#, which causes less effort, than to be obliged to use another finger than was originally at that fret; and this alone aids ease and rapidity of motion.

The following wood engraving, also from a photograph, is a very fair illustration of the manner of fingering this position.



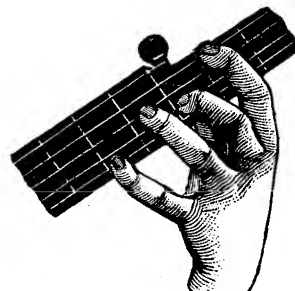
The hand here is said to be in the "4th position," because the first finger is at the 4th fret; and this rule will be followed always in designating the different positions of the left hand.

The following chord, also in the "4th pos.," is one that may be met with in playing in the key of B major (5 sharps), it being the dominant chord of that key. It is also apt to be met with in playing in other keys,—in compositions that have modulations to any extent.



Sometimes the lowest note, C#, is omitted in writing this chord for the banjo, which is done to make it easier to handle. When this note is omitted it is a very easy matter to finger the three notes with the first, second and little fingers. But there is one objection to the omission of the lower C#, in this position, and the objection is a strong one. When the triad, composed of the three upper notes alone is played, the bass string is left to itself to jar and disturb the harmony; but when it is stopped at the 4th fret the harmony is increased and the power of the chord thereby greatly augmented.

The following illustration shows the position of the fingers in producing this chord.



In some compositions which are performed with the "elevated bass string"—designated "Bass to B"—where the fourth string is tuned a full tone above its ordinary

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pitch,—this same chord is generally written with its fundamental note underneath, as in the following example:



This chord is very easily fingered when the bass string is "tuned to B," because the lowest note, F#, is then found at the 7th fret, on the bass string; (the fourth string) but the chord written in this position cannot be fingered with the bass string tuned to "A," in the ordinary manner.

In playing in the key of E major, the dominant seventh chord, which is expressed thus:



is quite easy to finger, using the second finger to cover the third and fourth strings at the 2d fret, and placing the first finger on the second string at the 1st fret. Or, if preferred, the second finger may be used for the fourth string, 2d fret, and the third finger, on third string, 2d fret, which answers the same purpose.

But when the chord is written as shown in the following example:

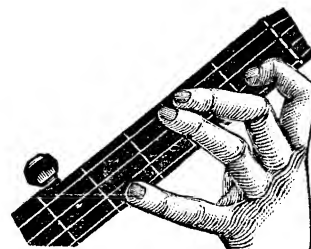


then a greater stretch of fingering is necessary, and it is not unusual to hear the pupil complain that he cannot reach his little finger out so as to produce the note D (#) at the 4th fret. This difficulty, however, disappears as soon as the pupil has learned to place his hand in a proper position. In this chord the second finger makes the notes B and F, by covering the fourth and third strings at 2d fret; the first finger makes A on the second string at 1st fret, and the little finger is used to stop the first string at the 4th fret to make D. Now, if the hand is held in just such a position as it would be in making the simple chord of A in the "first position," it is not to be expected that the little finger will extend itself far enough—especially on a Banjo of large size—to stop the string at the 4th fret with ease; but by bringing the hand more from under the neck the notes are all to be had without discomfort, especially after a little practice.

The following illustration shows the manner of placing the fingers to make the chord spoken of.

Of course, neither wood cuts or photographs will do for a pupil what a *competent personal instructor* can do in pointing out the proper position of the hand and fingers in any case whatever; but there are some ardent admirers of the banjo who can not find in their locality a competent person to instruct them or give them the points they require, and for such these articles are mainly intended, there never having been any thing of the kind published previous to this work.

The wood engravings of "position fingering," etc., are made from the photographic negatives, taken by Mr. Chas. N. Gorton, at the private residence of the writer, and are believed to be as perfect representations of the different positions as can be got with a camera.

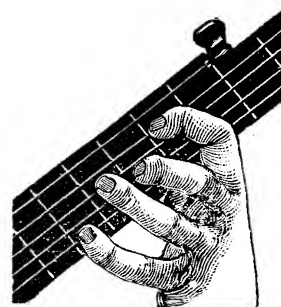


The chord of A major in the 8th pos., with the bass string open as the fundamental note, is sometimes, in leading banjo parts of a composition written for two or more instruments, changed to the chord shown in the following example, having the dominant note of the chord as the lowest note, and when so written it is done for effect.



This chord is in the 7th pos., as the first finger falls at the 7th fret on the fourth string to produce the note E,—the third finger is used to make C on the third string, the second finger for E on the second string, and the little finger for A on the first string.

The following cut will illustrate the fingering of this chord, which is similar to that of the chord of F#, previously illustrated.



The chord of B minor, which is also the supertonic chord of A major, and which in banjo music is written thus:

2\* Bar.



is produced as a "Barré chord" in 2d position. The first finger covering the fourth and third strings at 2d fret produce the two lowest notes, B and F; and the third finger covering the second and first strings at 3d fret, produces the remaining notes, B and D.



The following illustration will show the manner of stopping the strings for this chord.



When any of the strings are stopped at the 12th fret, which lies mid-way between the nut and the bridge, the note produced will sound an octave higher than the open string.

The term *Barré* is a French word and signifies a temporary nut or cap-da-astro. The abbreviation "Bar." is used to represent the word *Barré*.

In stopping the strings for the chord of A, in the "natural key of the Banjo," as in the following example,



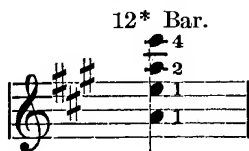
it is only necessary to use two fingers—for the notes A and C—for the remaining notes, E and A, represent the two "open strings" which produce those notes without having to be stopped with the fingers.

Now, we will suppose that the same chord is wanted, *one octave higher*. Then we will have the chord as expressed in the following example—and produced at the 12th position.

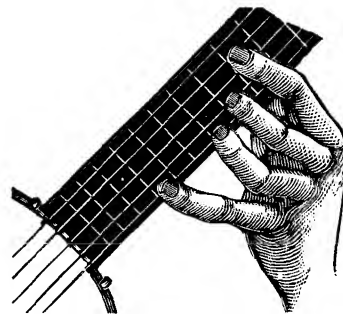


Here A and E are an octave higher than in the chord in the 1st position, and not having the nut at the end of the fingerboard, as in that position, we are obliged to create a temporary nut by means of the *Barré*. The first finger is placed across the four strings at the 12th fret and the A and C are got on the second and first strings respectively by use of the first and second fingers. Here we pursue a different method of fingering from that deemed advisable in the lower positions where the frets are further apart:—instead of using the third and fourth fingers, as were used in the "5th pos. bar." we use the second and third fingers, because, as has been said, the frets as we approach nearer to the banjo rim are much closer together; and also for still another reason do we deem it advisable to finger in this manner.

Sometimes the following chord will be used—



when it will be necessary to make the note E on the first string, at the 17th fret, at the same time holding the same position of the other fingers in the chord as explained. When this chord is taken the fingers will assume the position as shown in the following illustration.



The time was—and only a few years ago—when to be able to play "barré chords" on a Banjo was considered a great accomplishment by many would be banjoists. Then was the time when there were few books of instruction for the instrument and still fewer teachers. In those days, when a person wished to acquire a knowledge of banjo playing he was obliged to get the knowledge he sought as best he could; and to many who were ignorant of the principles of music the *barré* was something that frequently assumed a sort of scare-crow shape in their minds and gave them an idea that there was some great mystery about it that was beyond the understanding of most men and that a little of it would go a great way.

The "simple-method fake," and the teacher who played "by ear," could not explain the simple principle on which barré chords were constructed, or if they could do so, they doubtless found it more of an immediate profit not to do so; and so for a time the aspiring banjoist was often a volume of unconscious ignorance, and he and his banjo were ostracized from musical society,—not only on account of a non-understanding of the barré chords, but on account of a profound ignorance of every thing pertaining to the musical capabilities of the instrument he espoused. Good books and a better class of teachers have gradually changed this order of things, and neither the "barre chord" or "change of key" will in the least bother the banjoist of the present day, nor destroy the placidity of his countenance.

As the 12th fret lies mid-way between the nut and the bridge, it follows that the length of string from the nut to the 12th fret is the same as from the 12th fret to the bridge. Hence, the following rule may be laid down. All the positions that are made on the banjo fingerboard between the nut and 12th fret, are possible to be repeated from the 12th fret to the end of the fingerboard, or as far as there are frets upon which to produce them. All notes produced on the strings from the 12th fret upwards (towards the banjo bridge) will be an octave higher than those produced from the nut upwards (towards the 12th fret). The term "up" or "upwards" must here be understood as signifying *ascending the scale*: whether the banjo neck is pointed upwards or downwards in this understanding has nothing to do with it. When I speak of going upwards, in this work, let it be understood in a musical sense only.

Having acquired all the principal positions on the fingerboard, from or between the nut and the 12th fret, the pupil has only to consider the 12th fret as the nut, and from that point produce the same chords in the next



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octave—from the 12th fret upwards—as far as he has frets upon his instrument to work with; remembering that the notes thus produced are the same—only an octave higher—as those he has learned previously. At the same time, he will remember the observations on fingering, using the fingers best adapted to the chords he uses. In Barré chords, where the frets are furthest apart, different fingering will be used from where the frets are close together. From the nut towards the 12th fret the frets will be twice as far apart as from the 12th fret towards the rim.

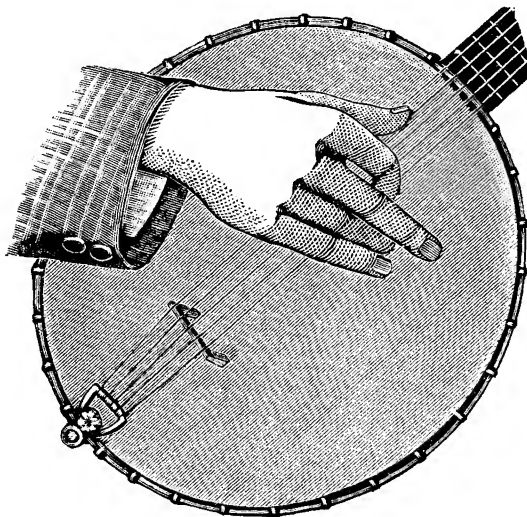
### THE TREMOLO MOVEMENT.

In playing or executing the *tremolo* movement,—which is one of the most expressive and beautiful movements in banjo playing,—the right fore-arm rests upon the rim of the Banjo, and the second, or third, finger rests lightly

upon the banjo-head. This serves as a complete support to the hand. The index finger of right hand is used to produce the *tremolo*, which is mostly performed upon the first string; the second and third strings being occasionally used, however,—although, as far as practicable, melodies which can be produced entirely upon the first string are preferred, because it is much easier to manage the *tremolo* on this string alone, than upon any of the inner strings; there being no impediment to the oscillating movement of the finger on this string.

To produce the *tremolo*, the finger oscillates rapidly, but gently, over this string,—barely touching the string,—and taking care not to give sufficient pressure with the tip of the finger on the string to interfere with its rapid motion, to and fro.

Beautiful expression may be produced in this manner of execution, but it requires a great deal of practice.



The above wood engraving which is made from a photographic negative, taken from the instrument in the hands of the writer, by Mr. C. N. Gorton, shows the position of the right hand in the *tremolo* movement, although it may be said that the bend in the finger is somewhat exaggerated in the cut; the true position of this finger being nearly perpendicular.

The thumb of right hand should, of course, be free to pick the strings used in connection with the *tremolo*, as an accompaniment to the melody; for the perfected *tremolo* movement is really a double movement—expressing the melody in *tremolo* style, together with an accompaniment, executed with the thumb, upon the strings not in use for the *tremolo*.

Sometimes the *tremolo* is performed upon more than one string at a time—sometimes on two strings, sometimes

upon three, or four,—and in such cases the thumb notes, or accompaniment part, is omitted. This is generally done, in certain passages, for expression; also used in Banjo Clubs, and in playing various combinations of instruments.

In playing the *tremolo* on a single string, such as may be used in “Home, Sweet Home,” and other melodies, together with the accompanying thumb notes, the fore-arm rests upon the banjo-rim as shown in the engraving, and it is quite unnecessary, not to say awkward, to elevate the arm from this position.

But in producing the movement upon, say, three strings, so as to form chords, the arm may well be raised from the rim, as much more muscular force is required for such movements.

A movement written like the following example (No. 1)—

EXAMPLE NO. 1. (*Tremolo, as written.*)



will be really played, or expressed, as shown in Example No. 2.

EXAMPLE NO. 2. (*Tremolo, as expressed.*)

The finger, moving in a rapid oscillatory manner upon the string, will produce the notes about as expressed in the second example, when playing the previous example in *tremolo*. The notes, however, are expressed in the *tremolo* movement in a sort of continuous slur; there being no stops between the notes, as the finger must keep up its continuous trill. Practice will enable the pupil to give expression to his music; rendering the tones soft or loud, as desired; and in increasing and diminishing the volume of sound produced, by the manner of operating the finger, viz.—increased pressure and lessened pressure on the string.

It is well to keep the nail of the first finger of right hand trimmed quite close, in order to prevent its interference with the free movement of the finger upon the string. A hard-finger end is an advantage, and the hard finger-end may be obtained by continuous practice in picking the strings. A thimble for tremolo playing is unnecessary—in fact, greatly diminishes the power of expression, and the writer has never found it of any use

whatever, for this style of execution.

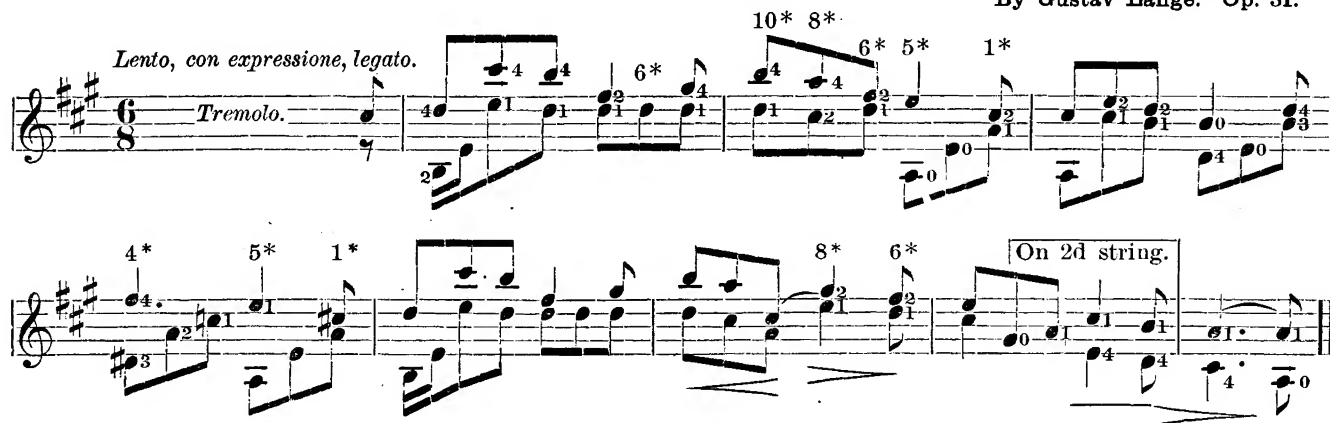
The notes expressed in "Example No. 2," may also be played in the regular picking style, using the first and second fingers alternately. When done rapidly a *tremolo* is produced in this way; but it is not applicable to all pieces, like the original *tremolo* movement as above illustrated.

The pupil may now take the following example in *tremolo* playing and endeavor to apply the remarks laid down to it. For this example the first strain only, of the piece is used—not having space for the entire composition. This melody, it is true, looks at first glance rather complicated, but will soon become simple enough, if the pupil will set to work to analyze it.

All the notes having the stems turned upwards are to be executed with the first finger, in *tremolo*. All the notes with stems turned downwards are to be picked with the thumb, forming an accompaniment to the melody.

## "FLOWER SONG."

By Gustav Lange. Op. 31.



*Note.*—It is not always the case that the abbreviation "*tr*" for *tremolo*, is placed over the notes. The mere notice that the movement is to be played "*tremolo*," or that word, placed at the beginning of the strain, is deemed sufficient in most cases. In violin music "*tr*" would be understood as an abbreviation for *trill*, which is quite a different thing.

It may be well, before proceeding further, to explain some of the signs and abbreviations found in the above example.

A sign, thus: \*, stands for "position," and refers always to the left hand fingering; the "position" of which is taken from the fret at which the first finger rests.

For illustration, take the second measure: we have the 10\*, 8\*, 6\*, 5\* and 1\*, all contained in that one measure. The first finger on D, and the little finger on B, is in the 10th position. The second finger on C, and the little finger on A, is in the 8th position. It is true that, in this case, the first finger does not fall upon any fret; but the hand is in such position that the first finger would fall naturally at the 8th fret, if there was a note to be made there. The first finger on D, and the second finger on F, is in the 6th position. The E, at 5th fret, may be made with the first finger, but it is better to stop the note with second finger, at same time bringing the first finger down at the same fret on second string, as this will prevent the harmony being disturbed by the open string jarring; so we call this "5th position," after which, we

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have A and C at first position. Each fret on the Banjo may be called a "position." A little study and practice will soon make this clear to the student.

If the performer finds a freer use of the first finger in making the *tremolo* with the *third* finger used as a rest, in place of the *second* finger, there can be no objection to that position of the hand, as it can not interfere with the freedom of the thumb in executing the accompaniment notes.

In passages like the following, where it is necessary to produce the *tremolo* on three or four strings, in the form of chords, a complete control over the first finger can not well be had if either the second or third finger is allowed to rest upon the Banjo-head. Hence, in playing such movements it is better to rest the *thumb* upon the head, in place of either finger. In this position the fore-arm is elevated from the banjo-rim, and the thumb, of course, rests on the upper portion of the head, above the strings.



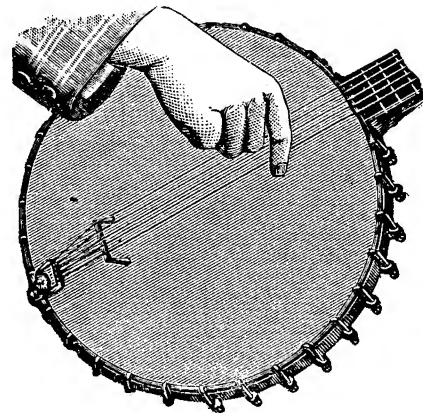
The above melody, performed *tremolo*, would be expressed about like the following.



The *tremolo*, as has been said, is one of the most beautiful as well as expressive movements possible on the Banjo. By it we are able to produce *sustained tones* on our instrument, and the exquisite effect of a melody with accompaniment, in two parts.

The writer, in his book called "THE BANJO," gives an account of the wonderful reception accorded Mr. E. M. Hall, the well known banjoist, on his first appearance in London, England, some years ago, and the enthusiastic applause which greeted his rendition of the melody, Home, Sweet Home, with variations, in which the *tremolo* movement was introduced. This movement, well rendered, on a really good instrument, places the Banjo almost on a par with the violin—that "king of instruments;" but where the powers and capabilities of the violin are known and fully recognized, those of the Banjo are still comparatively unknown, for we have fewer artists among our professional and amateur banjoists than exist among violinists.

The *tremolo* movement is capable of producing more expression, greater musical effect, and a finer singing quality of tone than the Guitar has ever yet proved itself capable of. The Mandolin possesses the power of giving a sort of *tremolo*, by the use of the plectrum upon its double wire strings; but even this is in no way worthy of comparison with the *tremolo* of a good player upon a good banjo; and moreover the mandolin requires another instrument to sustain it, and is incapable of producing the varied effect of both melody and accompaniment at the same time, of which the banjo is capable. The Zither, even, beautiful instrument that it is, and giving so exquisite a melody with accompaniment, stops short at the *tremolo*, and the banjo is here left without a rival.



Illustration, showing position of hand in producing the *tremolo* on three and four strings at once.

Years ago when the banjo was a much more crude instrument than it is at the present time, a great deal of execution was done in "stroke" style, with a thimble. It is not my purpose, just now, to discuss the merits of that particular style; but it is quite *apropos* to mention a certain kind of *tremolo*, or trill, movement that was got on the banjo under that style of execution, but which to-day is considered coarse, and has been almost entirely discarded.

The following example is a specimen of the old fashioned *tremolo*. It is executed with the first finger and thumb. A thimble should be worn on the first finger. This movement is, of course, separate and distinct from the "Guitar style" of banjo playing, and it will not take long for the student to determine which is the more musical of the two styles.

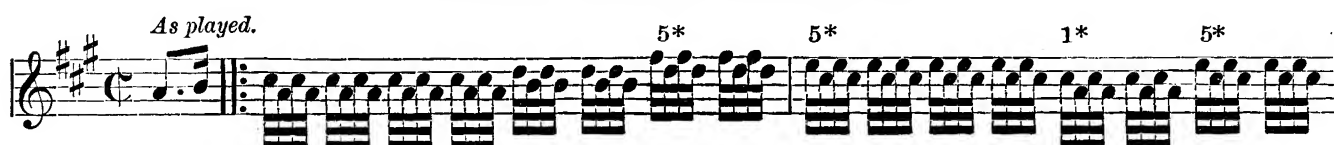
#### STROKE TREMOLO MOVEMENT.



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## STROKE TREMOLO MOVEMENT.

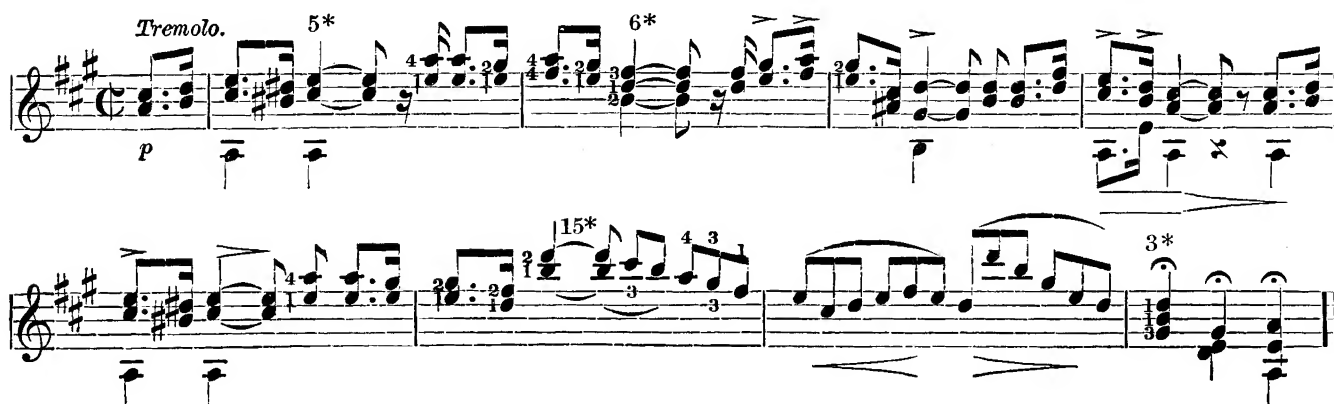


The following arrangement, "Hear Me, Norma," makes an excellent example for *tremolo* playing. It is expressive and well adapted to the Banjo. It will be seen that nearly all of the melody is written in double notes, which are to be performed *tremolo*, with the first finger. All the notes with stems pointing upwards are to be played *tremolo*, and the few notes having stems turned

downwards are to be picked with the thumb, as usual.

The *tremolo* exercises so far given are deemed sufficient to give the pupil a complete insight into this style of banjo playing; indeed, it may be said that if the pupil will practice the exercises in *tremolo* here given, until proficient in them, he will find what remains to be acquired quite an easy task.

## HEAR ME, NORMA.



## THE OLD AND THE NEW BANJO.

Banjo music has so changed in general character during the last few years that one who was unfamiliar with the instrument and its performers would scarcely realize the great change for the better that has taken place.

There is an old melody that was sung years ago by minstrel performers, as a Banjo song, called "Stop dat Knockin'," or "Sussey Brown." It used to be "thumped" in the key of E on the Banjo, and the introduction to the song was played with a thimble, in about the style found in the following example.

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## "STOP DAT KNOCKIN'."

STROKE STYLE.



One would hardly recognize in the foregoing old style thumping tune the melody as it is played to-day.

The following is an arrangement of the melody—complete, with exception of chorus—for playing in the *tremolo* style.

All the notes with stems turned upwards are trilled,

or played *tremolo*, with the first finger. The notes having stems turned downwards are to be picked with the thumb, and serve as an accompaniment to the melody, which should be performed with expression.

The example here given may be used either as an introduction to the song, in singing, or as an instrumental solo, by itself. It is considered quite effective.

## "STOP THAT KNOCKING."

MODERN BANJO SOLO.

*Andante con espressione.*  
*Tremolo.*

*p*

*mf*

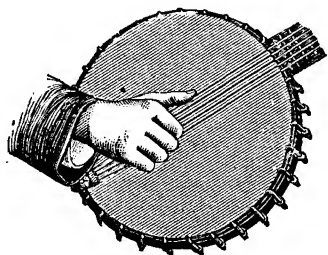
*rit.....*

*a tempo.*

### "STROKE PLAYING."

In the old fashioned stroke, or thimble playing, spoken of previously, no rest, or support, of the hand—by placing the little finger upon the banjo-head—is required. The strings are struck downwards, towards the head, with the nail of the first finger, or with the "banjo-thimble," which is used upon that finger. The thumb is also used, mainly to pick the fifth string, but also on the other strings, as occasion may require.

The position of the right hand in thimble, or stroke, playing is illustrated in the following wood engraving.



The position of the hand in playing the "stroke tremolo," previously mentioned, is almost identical; the only difference being that the thumb in that movement would not be found resting upon the fifth string, as shown in the cut.

In the performance of some Marches, Quicksteps, etc., this style is very advantageous; as the tone produced from the Banjo, by striking the strings downwards, with the thimble, can be made much more powerful and penetrating than is possible in picking the strings,—either upwards or sideways,—with the bare finger-ends. It stands to reason, that the vibrations of the strings, being conducted to the head through the bridge, will be much more forcible when the string is struck downwards, than when plucked, or pulled, in the opposite direction; and that the *acuteness* of the sound produced will be augmented by the string being struck with a firm metallic substance, more or

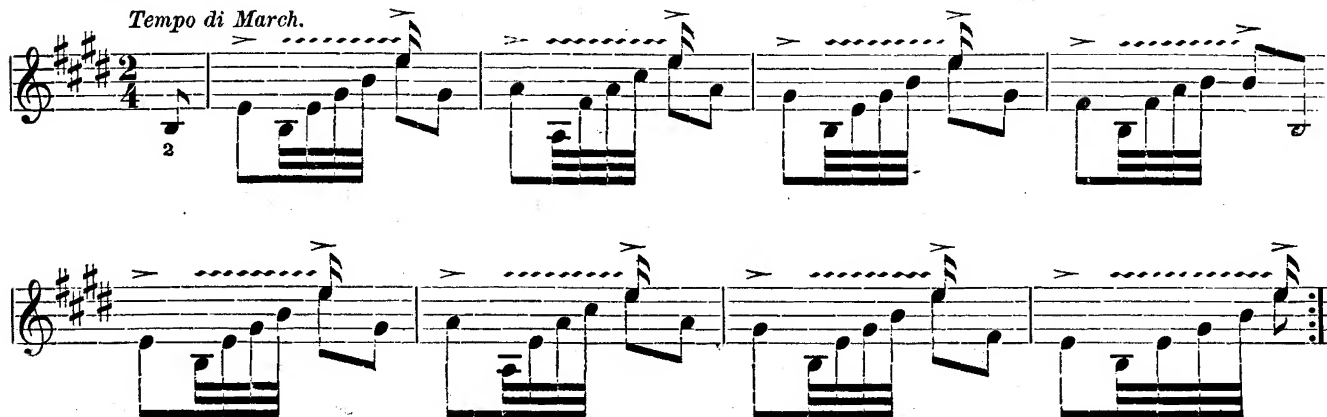
less elastic, than if struck or plucked with a soft pad, like the finger-tip. Good players are aware of this, and you will find that an experienced banjo player, in playing in the guitar style, or picking, uses his thumb, on the bass string, particularly, as far as possible for a downward stroke of that string. The novice can, without much loss of time, readily experiment a little for himself and find out whether his bass string, for example, sounds best with an upward pluck on the string, or with a downward blow, or sharp pick, downwards, towards the head. In fact, the plucking of the string upwards always causes more or less of a slapping noise—sometimes the string being caused to strike against the frets or fingerboard, by reason of its being pulled upwards, and having to rebound again—and thus vibrating backwards and forwards. If the string is struck downward, it, of course, must vibrate in the same direction; but the downward blow does not cause so much of the slapping sound, because, in the first place, the downward blow causes a more decided and acute tone, and in pulling the string upwards, it is always pulled further away from its position than should be the case. Hence, it becomes necessary for the young banjoist to study from the beginning to produce a full and clear tone, and to endeavor to get the fullest quantity of musical tone from his instrument, and, at the same time, the best *quality* of tone possible to produce. In either style of playing, whether stroke or picking, it is necessary to understand certain principles upon which banjo music must be based. Stroke, or thimble playing, not being in use to any great extent to-day,—and few teachers of the present time being qualified to give instruction in that branch,—coupled with the fact that the guitar style, or picking, is deemed, by far, the more elegant and refined, as well as the most practicable,—leads me to confine my observations in the present articles mostly to the latter; but the "stroke style" cannot be permitted to pass entirely without notice.

The following example in stroke playing will be found quite a good exercise for the student. It is played with a thimble, and the thumb is used only for the fifth string. The first two notes, B and E, are struck with the thimble, and the four notes that follow are executed by sliding the thimble over the necessary strings, which is followed by the note, E, plucked with the thumb. The exercise should be practiced in accurate time and the accented notes given full force.

### STROKE EXERCISE.

No. 1.

*Tempo di March.*



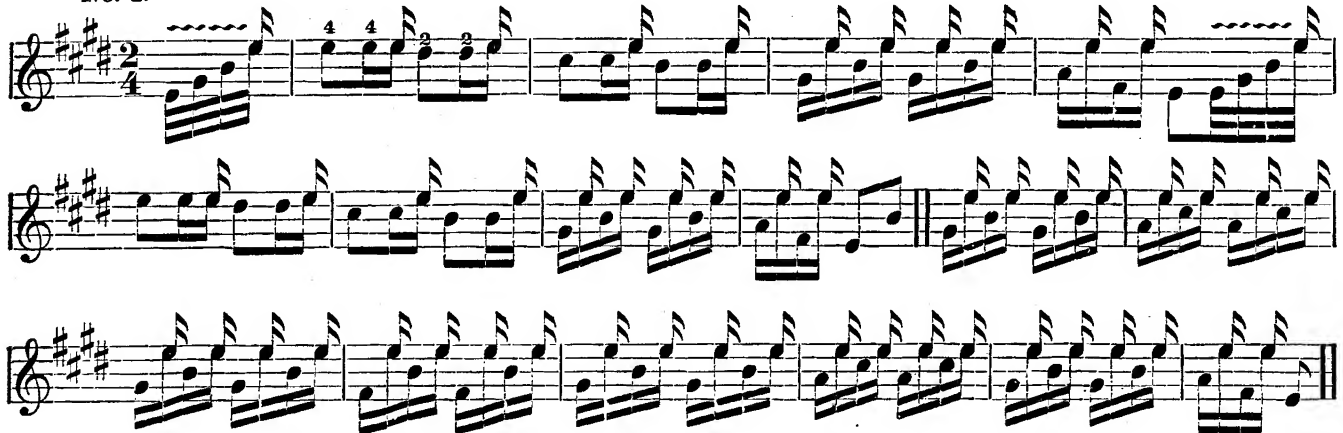
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Next, we have another stroke exercise, in the old plantation style. This starts out with a "roll," or slide of the the thimble over the four strings, and is so simple as not to require special comment.

As in the previous example, the thumb is used only for the fifth string. It should be practiced rather slowly until learned, and then may be practiced in quicker time.

## STROKE EXERCISE.

No. 2.



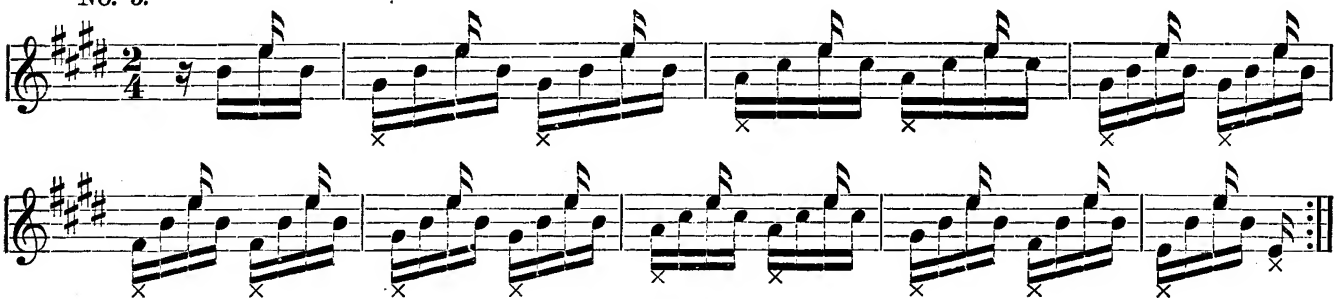
In striking the strings with the thimble, where the notes are accented, it is customary to bring the end of the thumb against the outer edge of the fore finger, or against the thimble, to serve as a support, or brace, to that finger; otherwise the natural suppleness of the finger-joint will

prevent a sharp, decisive blow being given the string—which is necessary if the note is to be acute.

In the following exercise (No. 3), the thumb is used for all notes, marked ×, besides being used, of course, for the fifth string.

## STROKE EXERCISE.

No. 3.



We will now leave "stroke playing" for the present, and proceed with other interesting generalities.

## THE HANDLING OF THE PEGS.

In tuning the banjo, it is necessary in order to obtain a certain command of the pegs, to understand certain principles.

There are several different kinds of "patent pegs" for Banjos, in use to-day, which may be operated by any novice; as all that is necessary is to possess sufficient strength to turn them, either one way or the other. But as the majority of instruments possess the old fashioned pegs, and as it is not to be supposed that the use of them will ever be entirely superseded, it is deemed advisable to give a few hints on the proper handling of the pegs, by which the strings of a banjo are tuned.

Banjo pegs,—sometimes called keys,—are made of ebony, rosewood, box, maple, or other hard and durable woods; also of bone, ivory and celluloid. The ebony and

celluloid pegs are more in use to-day than any other kind. Bone and ivory pegs are easily broken and are therefore undesirable. Rosewood is a very excellent wood for this purpose, on account of its containing a natural oil, which renders pegs made of that wood to hold better than most any other kind. But for some reason rosewood has never come into general use for pegs, and there are few made of that material; the ebony pegs taking precedence. Celluloid, or imitation ivory, also makes a most satisfactory peg, and a great many of them are in use.

The Banjo pegs should be of a perfect taper, and the holes for their reception, in the banjo scroll, should be tapered with a reamer, so as to exactly fit the peg, and then there will be an even bearing on the peg on all sides. If the taper is true in both instances, what little wear in the hole is occasioned by a few years use will not make any important difference, provided the pegs have been left sufficiently long to allow of their being pushed further upwards. Should the holes become, in course of time, too



large, they may be bored out and a bushing of wood inserted, after which they should be re-drilled and again reamed out to the proper taper.

If the pegs are a perfect fit to the tapered holes, and are at the same time true and straight, there is little chance of their slipping out of place in tuning the strings, providing they are properly handled.

Sometimes a drop of oil is necessary, rubbed upon the peg, together with a little chalk, and then carefully wiped off with a bit of paper; but the rubbing of rosin upon the pegs is not recommended.

There is a "knack" in handling the pegs that every banjo player does not possess. For instance, in tuning the first string; take hold of the peg, in a manner similar to that represented in the following engraving.

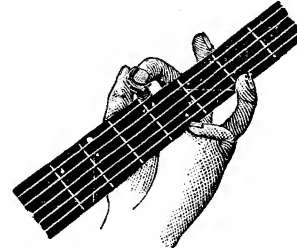


The first finger, pressing on the upper portion of the scroll, immediately over the peg being operated, will cause the peg to be held in place as it is being turned. This is very simple, and it is, at the same time, a good thing to know. The other strings,—the three remaining pegs of the scroll,—may be operated in a similar manner.

How often we see banjo players, in turning the pegs, to tune their instruments, go about it as though they had undertaken an arduous task. Finding the peg will not remain in place when they have turned it around enough to tighten the string, they proceed to grasp the neck, near its base, with the right hand, and then with the left, again give the peg a tremendous boost to drive it home;—only to find that the string is further out of tune than before. Then, perhaps, they reach up with the right hand, and grasping the neck firmly in the middle, to brace it, or themselves, for the awful work,—they give the peg another turn and another shove upwards. Such methods are entirely wrong and are not only an unnecessary trouble to the performer, but are often, as I shall shortly explain, a great injury to the instrument.

The short string (fifth string) peg is easily managed. The banjo neck may be allowed to rest against the left knee, if the performer is a man; but if a woman, it is

more genteel to handle the peg in the manner shown in the following illustration. The manner of holding the peg in position, and thereby controlling it, will be readily understood from this:



In handling the pegs, as in every thing else, there is a right and a wrong way. With the exception of what has been written and published by the writer of the present article, it is exceedingly doubtful if any thing bearing upon this subject has ever been given to the banjo playing public. And if the student is not instructed in these details, how is he to learn? Some few, it is true, possess a natural adaptability, which enables them to learn many of these points by a sort of instinct, as it were; but with the majority it is largely the other way.

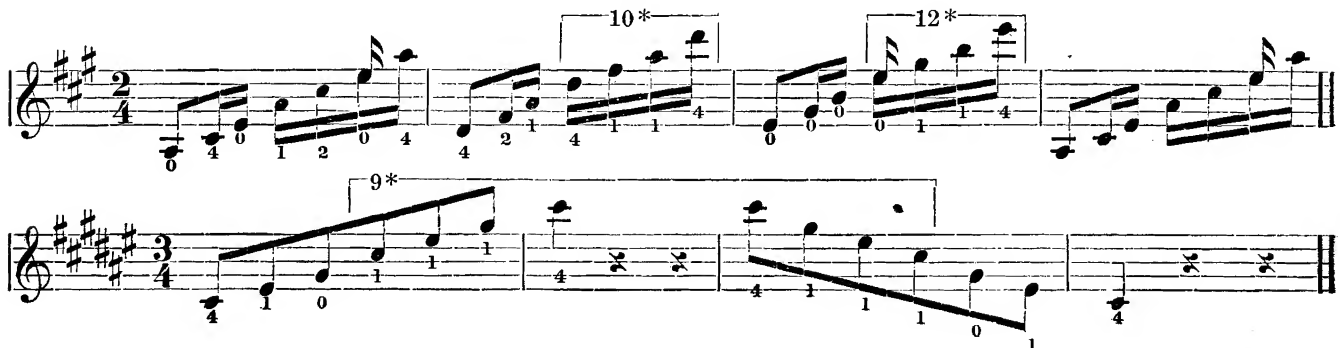
### THE BANJO BRIDGE.

Years ago, when the Banjo was a clumsy affair,—and before banjo playing had become *an art*, as it is to-day,—it was customary to use a very large bridge, and to have plenty of room to work around the strings.

The following wood cut is an exact representation of a banjo bridge used many years ago. The bridge, from which this illustration was made, has been in the possession of the noted writer of banjo music, Mr. Albert Baur, for about twenty-eight years.



It was on an old banjo which had been out of use for several years. This bridge measures as follows:  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches long at bottom— $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches at top— $\frac{1}{4}$  of an inch high. It will be seen that there is a great deal of waste of material in it, the feet spreading out considerably more than was ever necessary to hold up the strings. Fancy a performer now-a-days executing passages like the following with such a bridge; or playing a tremolo on all the strings at the same time.



# Observations on the Banjo and Banjo Playing

BY S. S. STEWART

Continued from No. 69

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To-day we have something a little nearer to the proper thing, and the following cut is a very fair illustration of the banjo-bridge of to-day.



It is made of maple;  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch high and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide. This height allows of cutting the notches sufficiently deep to hold the strings well in place, and allows sufficient space to have them far enough from the edges so that the strings will not tear the wood away.

There is no absolute rule for determining the exact position the bridge should occupy on the head of the Banjo in calculating the measurement for the frets. Of course, after the frets have been placed in position, the bridge must remain in the original position given it—as the distance from nut to bridge is the length of string which must be divided to establish the position of the frets. But in fixing the position of the bridge on the banjo—laying aside the matter of frets—there is no rule to govern it. Some performers like the softer sound of the strings, which is secured by having the bridge nearer to the extreme end,—and others *vice versa*. Some claim that the bridge should be placed one third the diameter of the rim from the extreme end, and that this position gives the instrument the best tone; but the writer has found nothing in his experience that leads him to believe for one moment that such is the case, or that any such rule can be safely laid down as absolute. The position the bridge occupies in the Stewart Banjos has been finally settled upon after a course of experimenting, and is not fixed by-rule. The small metallic *frets*, also, used on these Banjos, are the result of various experiments, covering a period of several years.

"Fashions change." Where we see the "dandy," wearing pants so tight, one year, that you would think he could hardly walk—the next year finds him with pants of the opposite pattern, made in the order of a bloomer dress. The same thing applies to nearly all fashions in dress. So we see fashion of a certain order has had its influence on the banjo-bridge, and its position upon the head. At one period we have the bridge of extremely large proportions, followed by one absurdly small:—from one extreme to the other.

Again, at one time we had the bridge set almost in the middle of the Banjo-head;—then the other extreme,—the bridge set as near to the tail-piece as it possibly could be got, and the tail-piece as small as it used to be large. Foolish minds run from one extreme to another—rebound, as it were, like a rubber ball, which is as empty as the craniums of many of the "simple-method" banjo teachers, spoken of in the forepart of this article. \* \* \* \* \*

Briefly speaking, then, the *Banjo-Bridge* should be composed of the wood which, by constant experiment, has been proven the best adapted to the purpose,—and this wood is maple. Its position upon the banjo-head should be at that point where the greatest power and purity of tone is found possible to be produced. These points have been obtained by constant experimenting—and *can only be obtained in that way*.

The exact height that a bridge should be is a point subject to variance; for much depends upon other factors in the case, and more will be said upon this subject presently.

The following passages, as will be seen, may be fingered in more than one way.



The foregoing Examples are given to illustrate different manners of executing the same musical passages. As to which of the manners of fingering, marked, is correct, we think one as correct as the other—it being a "matter of taste"—or at least, a matter of individual adaptability, as to which of the two methods of fingering is the better way.

## THE BANJO STRINGS.

A good Banjo if strung with poor strings may sound very poorly. The same may be said when the strings have been kept too long on the instrument—even if they were good when first put on. There is a certain *art* in stringing a banjo well and appropriately. There are some supposed good performers who do not understand this, and the result is often manifested in a decided crippling of the power and musical attractiveness of their instruments.

If a Banjo is strung so that the second string is of the same thickness as the first string, and the the third string but very little thicker; both the second and third strings must be much looser when tuned to pitch, than the first string. It is not unusual to find banjos strung with a second string of the same thickness as the first—and in fact both of the strings as thin as horse-hair. In such cases the second string will be as slack as though it were a strip of light rubber, and neither of the strings will have any power of tone. Now, in attempting to play an instrument strung in this manner, with pianoforte accompaniment, or upon the stage in a concert room, the tone must be flat and weak.

In stringing a banjo properly, strings of even thickness should be selected, and the first and fifth strings should be of the same thickness, or as nearly so as it is possible to select them. The third string should be a violin E string. If used for stage playing, the thickest E made, and if for parlor playing, an E string of medium thickness. The second string should be of a thickness between the first and third strings—neither as thick as the third string, or as light as the first. The banjo bass, or

## This Page, "Observations on the Banjo" was omitted from No. 70 Journal by mistake

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fourth strings, now-a-days, are manufactured especially for banjo use and there is not much trouble in selecting them; as the strings found in any one lot are all of uniform size.

The great trouble with strings is,—their being composed of a material made from the intestines of lambs, and being very sensitive, will break frequently in warm and moist weather; and it being a matter of very great difficulty to manufacture them of perfectly even thickness, they are frequently found faulty in tone. In fact, it is more often the case that strings *false in tone* are to be readily got than strings that are true. The only way in which a performer can guard against this, to any extent, is by purchasing strings in quantities—by the bundle—and then selecting those for his use which possess the most even and uniform appearance.

Quite recently a new string composed of *twisted silk* has been manufactured in Europe, and placed on the market by Robert Müller, of London, England, and this string has proven quite a novelty among banjo players. Imitations of this string have already been made in France; and as "imitation is the sincerest flattery," it stands to reason that the Müller string would not be imitated if it did not possess a certain merit.

The twisted silk strings are nearly all of uniform thickness and true in tone, and will withstand hot weather where a gut string proves utterly worthless. The tone produced from the silk string is equally as good as from the gut string, and it is only a question of a little time when the gut string, by reason of its falseness and tendency to break, through atmospheric changes, will be superseded by the silk string. The present difficulty is that the prices of the twisted silk strings are far higher than the gut strings; there being a tariff duty of 50 per cent. on silk strings imported in America, but no duty on gut strings; and it is supposed that all our readers are aware of the fact that only the Banjo bass strings are made in this country, the other strings being imported from Germany and other parts of Europe.

No effective *tremolo*, or expressive music of any character, can be produced on the banjo when strung with false strings; and after strings have been put on the instrument and proven false, the best thing to do with them is to take them off at once and try others.

About three years ago I published in the Banjo and Guitar Journal the result of a series of experiments with banjo and guitar strings, showing the weight required to bring certain strings to "concert pitch."

Recently a new test has been made of the weight required to produce the requisite tension for bringing strings on certain sized banjos to the pitch generally used, and the result is here briefly given. It will appear that the weight is less than reported after the previous experiments—some three years ago—but this is owing to the fact that in making these late experiments and tests, the instruments were arranged almost perpendicularly; so that the resistance of the string in the notch at the nut was avoided.

A Banjo with 12 inch rim and 19 inch neck, was used for the following test. The distance from the nut to the bridge was  $27\frac{1}{4}$  inches; from tail-piece to bridge,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

Gut strings were used, of the following sizes, per English Standard wire gauge; which is the most convenient and accurate gauge procurable for the purpose. (Such a gauge costs \$1.50, and may be had of dealers in tools and machinery.)

The pitch used was taken from the C tuning pipe in general use.

1st string, No. 26, weight required,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

2d string, No. 24, weight required, 8 pounds.

3d string, No. 22, weight required,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

4th, or bass, string, No. 23, weight required, 9 pounds.

When the bass string was raised a full tone, as in "Bass to B," the weight required was  $11\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

Thus, we find, that the ordinary "12 x 19" inch Banjo, requires a combined weight on the five strings of 38 pounds, in bringing it up to the concert pitch of C. The fifth string, it being understood, requiring the same as the first string. When the Bass is tuned to "B," the weight required for the entire five strings is  $40\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

An experiment with same banjo was made, using the twisted-silk strings (Müller's), with the following result.

Strings of precisely the same thickness were used in both cases.

The first string required  $5\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

The second string required  $7\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

The third string required  $6\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

The fifth string, same as the first.

The bass string being the same as mentioned in first instance, we have a combined weight in this case of  $33\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, showing that the gut strings of same thickness as the silk, require a greater weight to produce the pitch—and thus proving the tension less on the silk than on the gut strings to produce the same musical pitch.

I am of the opinion, however, that the twisted silk strings, on account of possessing less flexibility than the gut, are rather more severe—as regards strain on banjo-neck—than are the gut strings, when the strings are struck or picked.

The 7 inch "Piccolo Banjo," with 10 inch neck, using the same gut strings as in the previous experiment,—required the following weights to produce the concert pitch—an octave above the 12 inch rim Banjo.

First string  $7\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

Second string  $8\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

Third string 9 pounds.

Fourth, or Bass,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

It will be noticed that the strain on the strings of the Piccolo Banjo, as used in Banjo Clubs, is greater than the "Orchestra" Banjo, of 12 inch rim with 19 inch neck, by  $5\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, the Piccolo requiring  $43\frac{1}{2}$  pounds.

On the 11 inch rim Banjo, as commonly used, the weight required to produce the pitch of C, is a little less than required for the 12 inch Banjo.

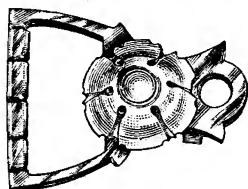
A steel wire bass string, such as is sometimes used by a certain class of banjo players, requires a weight of  $11\frac{1}{2}$  pounds to produce the pitch of C on the 11 inch Banjo; and 14 pounds to produce D. Whilst a good stout silk bass string (gauge No. 23), on the same Banjo, requires only  $8\frac{1}{2}$  pounds for C, and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  pounds for D.

The difference is accounted for by the greater density of the wire string, over the gut. It will be seen that not only is the tension on a steel bass string much greater than on the silk (the "steel" string is wound on a thin wire, and the "silk" is wound on strands of silk) bass string; but the lesser flexibility and greater density of the wire string, necessitates an increased strain on the instrument when the string is put in vibration, which is not the case with the more flexible string. It hardly requires an argument of this kind, however, to convince a banjo player

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that the steel wire bass string is not a desirable thing,—for a player in possession of a “musical ear” has only to try such a string once and that is sufficient.

In attaching the strings to a Banjo, the most simple contrivance in the form of a “Tail-piece,” that can be used, the better.



After a number of years experience, I have finally adopted for the Stewart Banjos a tail-piece in the form of above cut. The strings may be tied with a simple knot, and are easily and quickly fastened anew when broken. The small lug under the end, prevents the tail-piece from slipping either to one side or the other, and therefore the strings better hold the bridge in position, than if the tail-piece was permitted to swing on the bolt. The “lug” rests against the banjo-hoop and resists the tension of the strings, whilst the bolt simply serves to hold the tail-piece down against the hoop.

The bolt of a Banjo tail-piece should never be screwed down so tightly as to cause the tail-piece to press upon the head, which it may do when the head has been drawn down, as it stretches, until the top edge of the hoop is below the level of the head. When this is the case it is better to use a small piece of banjo-head,—or other parchment,—cut into an oblong strip, about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inches long, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch wide, and insert same under the part of the tail-piece that rests upon the edge of the rim, in order to prevent the tail-piece rubbing the head, on the edge of the rim, and perhaps resulting in the head wearing through at that place and being broken.

### THE HEAD, RIM, AND NECK.

There is no way, so far discovered, of ascertaining the exact pressure exerted upon the banjo-rim by the head, when strained tense; and there is little use in speculating upon the subject.

The skin forming the head, is placed over the rim when damp—the manner of performing the operation of “Putting on a Banjo-Head,” having been fully described by the writer, in previous works.

After the head becomes dry, it is drawn down over the rim as tightly as possible. To do this requires from 20 to 30 strong screw bolts with the proper nuts, as well as a perfectly strong hoop made for the purpose.

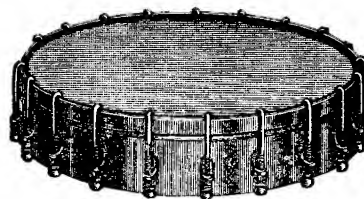
All the strain of the head falls directly upon one side of the rim, or circular frame; the other side being left open. Thus it will be seen that a rim to withstand this intense pressure and strain must be made very strong; and most makers in attempting to make rims that will have sufficient resistance to withstand this strain successfully, destroy at the same time all the elasticity of their rims in so doing. And when the elasticity and sensitiveness of the rim is destroyed, you might as well use a cart wheel for a banjo-rim; for such instruments possess no musical tone, and about all one hears from them, in the form of sound, is the intolerable clanking noise the

strings make in slapping against the frets on the finger-board. Where solid metal has been tried for banjo rims it has always resulted in failure, as has been explained in the pamphlet, called “The Banjo Philosophically.”

Some makers in using solid metal of one kind or another for banjo rims, have gone so far as to claim that such rims would not be affected by atmospheric changes; but any one having the least common sense knows that such a claim is absurd, for the very steel rails that compose our rail-way tracks, are affected by changes of weather.

In fact, a metal-rim is more readily affected by changes of temperature than a well made wood rim. The grain in the wood can be filled, by a chemical process, so as to render it to a certain extent, at least, proof against dampness; but metal can not be so treated. Even were it possible, however, to construct a Banjo so that the head, rim, neck and strings would remain proof against atmospheric changes, the fact still remains that as it is the air itself that is the real conductor of sound, no banjo could be made to sound as well in damp weather as in dry.

The following illustration shows a banjo-rim, having the head stretched upon it to the extent that it is ready to have the neck put in its place.

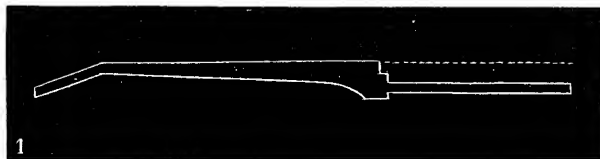


It is not absolutely necessary that the hoop (stretcher-band) should be drawn down all the way, before the Banjo can be used; but, of course, when the top edge of the hoop extends beyond the level of the head, the strings will strike against it in playing in the “higher positions,” and for this reason banjo players usually have at least two banjos in use, so that when a new head is put on one of them, time may be given it to properly stretch—and this can only be done by allowing the instrument a week or two, when it is necessary to have another one to use in the meantime, unless the player is content to play only in the “lower positions.”

It is absolutely necessary that the head of a Banjo should be strained perfectly tight, if one expects the instrument to sound well; and a head can not be properly stretched in one day—or in two.

The neck of the Banjo should be—so far as the surface composing the “fingerboard” is concerned—perfectly level and true. It should be fitted to the rim so that the surface of the fingerboard is on a level with the surface of the head of the Banjo.

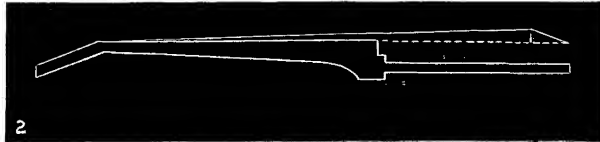
The following diagram will give a view of the surface of the fingerboard—the dotted line representing the level of the banjo-head.



When the neck lies in the manner shown, the bridge will raise the strings to a sufficient height to clear all the

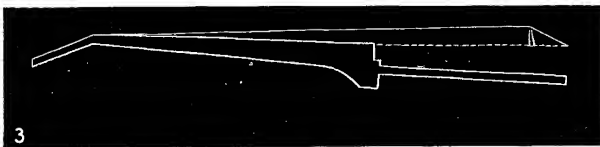
frets. If the bridge used is extra high, a slight downward pitch to the neck is sometimes necessary, in order to prevent the strings from being too far beyond the frets, and making them difficult to finger properly, with the left hand.

The following diagram shows the manner in which the bridge raises the strings from the head and fingerboard, when the neck is properly set to the rim.



It should be understood, however, that the diagram is not represented as accurate; the smallness of the design requiring an exaggeration of the height of the bridge, in order to display the lines at all in the engraving.

If the banjo-neck is set into the rim with an upward pitch, as shown in the following diagram, the strings will be brought too far from the frets for comfortable fingering, and the pressure of the strings upon the bridge will be lessened so that the tone is weakened.



In such a case as this, it would be folly to attempt to successfully remedy the difficulty by using a lower bridge. It is true that a lower bridge would bring the strings a little nearer to the fingerboard; but the tone would be weakened by reason of less pressure of the strings upon the bridge, and the bridge, too, would be inclined to constantly slip out of place during a performance.

Sometimes a neck will pull up in this way after the banjo has come into use. I am not now speaking of cases where the necks have *warped*, which may take place in either direction, and which has been explained in a former article on "Necks;" but it will frequently happen that although a neck is perfectly true in itself, and has been properly fitted to the rim,—yet as the head is stretched, and the hoop drawn down, the neck is drawn upwards at the nut, a very little, by the strain of the strings and by the force exerted by unskilled performers, who resort to the incorrect methods of handling the pegs, previously spoken of in these observations.



Take the above diagram as an illustration. A is the point where the neck presses against the banjo hoop, which is a movable and adjustable surface and not an absolutely fixed position. Now, suppose that the point, C, is properly fixed and secure; yet the pressure exerted by the strings,—or that exerted by the improper handling of the pegs, previously spoken of,—may be sufficient to cause the hoop that encircles the double thickness of head (skin), to *give* a very little; as all the pressure of the neck, in resisting the strain of the strings, must be borne at this point; and it must be remembered that there is no pos-

sible way of making this point (A) an absolutely fixed one;—for in order to do so, the principal point of importance—the power of keeping the head perfectly tight—will be done away with.

Now, as it is absolutely necessary to have the hoop, around the upper surface of the rim, easily movable, and fitted not so tightly that it will not readily go on over a double thickness of head,—which must be tucked round a wire and pass under the hoop,—it is out of the question to obtain at this point an absolutely unmovable rest for the neck. So it happens that a very slight change, or relaxation, at this point, permitting the neck to sink away from position in even the slightest degree, is particularly noticeable at the other end—or nut, B.

When a performer has a banjo, in which the neck has changed its pitch, so that the strings are found to be too high from the frets,—if no reliable and competent repairer is within easy access,—the following plan for temporary, and sometimes permanent relief of the difficulty is recommended.

After removing, or slacking the strings, and taking away the neck fasteners, wedges, etc., slightly release the neck from its position and insert a small piece of Banjo head,—just the width of the fingerboard where it rests against the hoop,—between the end of the neck and the hoop. Let the pressure fall upon this piece of head, where the neck meets the hoop. (See diagram No. 4, A.)

If, after trying the instrument, this is not found sufficient,—and the surface of the neck proves to be true and level—not to have warped,—a double thickness of skin, or a thin piece of wood may be used. If, after this, the strings are found still too high, and the bridge used is not more than  $\frac{3}{4}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch high, it is better to intrust the instrument to a competent workman for adjustment.

If a banjo-neck is found, as is often the case, to have a slight hollow in the fingerboard, it is not always a good plan to have the surface sand-papered down; for to do this necessitates first the removal of the frets, and the refretting afterwards. It is not well to experiment with a valuable instrument in this way if it can be avoided; and so long as the warp in the neck is not so bad as to interfere with its proper use by altering the pitch of the neck slightly downward, it is far better not to tamper with it.

Very few banjo-necks remain absolutely true; nor is it to be expected,—taking into consideration the strain of the strings, hard usage, changes of temperature, etc.,—that they should do so.

Every care should be taken in the making of them, that only the very best seasoned material is used; and that the veneering, gluing, etc., is done a long time in advance of their use; so that thorough seasoning of raw material, and proper seasoning also of the manufactured article, is assured, and faulty necks discarded, or faults properly remedied before the instruments are placed on the market.

Any such plan as inserting metal bars throughout the length of wooden necks, in order to keep them straight, is simply the method of ignorance; as metal of no kind whatever can be depended upon to hold a piece of wood straight that is inclined to warp. And in the construction of such barometer-like necks, nothing is so sure as disappointment in the result; for the thing will never work in the way the manufacturer desires.



Strain a banjo-head over a rim; place it near a stove, or in a hot place; and the increased strain exerted on the rim, by the action of the heat upon the head, is very severe. This is what a great many banjos are obliged to endure, time and time again.

### REMARKS ON BANJO HEADS.

If a head is put on a banjo-rim in clear, dry weather, the moisture will quickly dry out of the head, and in the course of 48 hours it will be sufficiently "hard" to admit of being strained, or "drawn down." If the head is strained when wet,—before having thoroughly dried out,—although it may not at once break, it will not last nearly as long as it otherwise would have done, because in straining a wet head the fibres are often ruptured or overstrained. Especially is this the case, when the head, although apparently perfectly dry on the surface, is still wet under the hoop—where it requires a much longer time to dry out than does the exposed surface.

Yet, it is absolutely necessary that the head should be *thoroughly stretched* over the rim, in order to secure a good tone from even the best Banjo ever manufactured, and a head that is not put on in dry, clear weather, although it may seem at once tight, and to require little or no stretching, yet allowance must be made for its stretching; or in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the hoop will be brought down and the head still remain flabby.

If the same head is put on a rim in very damp weather—the air being charged with moisture—the head will remain damp, the moisture failing to dry out. The same effect will be noticed if the head is put on during a clear day and the weather changes immediately afterwards. In this case the head may appear to be perfectly tight a few hours after being put on, and as soon as the damp weather makes its appearance the head will slacken again. It will thus be seen that it is necessary to get as much of the stretching quality out of the head as possible.

No two heads, however, have precisely the same capacity for stretching, and it frequently becomes a matter requiring some judgment to place the hoop so that the head in stretching will not cause it to remain for too long a time higher than is necessary; or on the other hand, so that the hoop will not be drawn down in the course of a few days and the head still remain loose—necessitating the hoop being drawn down until the "flesh hoop," or wire ring, around which the head is tucked, rests upon the brackets. Neither of these occurrences is desirable, and yet through the great difference in banjo-heads, and the fallibility of one's judgment concerning them, such difficulties are likely to occur. It is often an exasperating thing to get a seemingly good head on a Banjo, and after it is nicely stretched have it break. This is another occurrence that takes place frequently, and which it is sometimes impossible to guard against.

All heads have a stretching capacity, but some require a great deal more stretching than others. When the weather is very dry, after a head has been put on the banjo-rim and been allowed time to dry out thoroughly, so that there is no moisture in that portion of the head which is hidden under the hoop, if the head resists straining it is often advisable to furnish artificial moisture to cause the head to *give* somewhat. But in doing this it is not advisable to dampen the head with a wet towel, or to sponge it over; for such operations sometimes cause the head to break. The better plan is not to bring any moisture in direct contact with the head, but to place the rim with the head on—or even the entire instrument—

within such conditions that moisture may be absorbed by the head to a slight degree only. To do this, wet a towel and place the wet towel upon a piece of board. Then lay the banjo-rim upon this board over the wet towel, with the head side of the rim upwards. The head being a ready absorbant of moisture will take up sufficient of the dampness from the towel to cause it to relax, when it may be tightened, and if it should break under this treatment, one may rest assured that it would have broken, just the same, without the treatment. Sometimes an apparently very tight head will come down readily when subjected to this treatment. It is not necessary to leave the banjo-rim over the damp cloth for more than an hour at a time and care should be taken that it is not exposed to heat or left in a hot, dry room immediately afterwards.

### TO PREVENT THE BANJO-HEAD BECOMING TOO DRY.

The writer has a method of treating banjo-heads that are kept in the house constantly, where it is warm and dry, which he has found to work very favorably. The method is as follows:—After the head has been put on and the dampness dried out of it, take two (2) drops of the *oil of sweet-almonds*; saturate a small piece of tissue paper with it; rubbing the paper together thoroughly until all the oil has been well distributed through the paper. Then with this oiled paper, rub the surface of the banjo-head all over, carefully, for about two or three minutes, when it may be wiped off with a piece of dry tissue paper.

This process will impart just enough moisture to the head to prevent its drying out and becoming brittle, and has never been known to cause a head to break. It must not be supposed, however, that any such process will cause a head that is already weak and brittle to stand without breaking. No process is claimed to transform a weak head into a strong one—especially a banjo-head.

Another thing, the reader is cautioned not to run into extremes in using oil for the banjo-head: Two drops of oil to saturate paper with—is different from pouring a spoonful of oil or grease upon the head, direct—or even two drops. Do not run into extremes, and after getting the banjo-head all greasy and gummy, complain that Stewart was the cause of it. Be careful to follow directions. The reason I prefer the oil of sweet-almonds is because it is easily procured and is most likely to be sweet and fresh. Nobody would care about using cod liver oil, or sperm oil, for such a purpose, and have a fishy smelling banjo under their nose constantly.

### THE BRIDGE IN POSITION.

It may be well here to remark that while it was necessary to remove the *Bridge* from the Banjo, in times past,—when the instrument was carried or kept in a cloth bag, or soft leather case,—to-day, where the Banjo is always kept in a stiff leather box-case, with good lining, it is quite unnecessary to remove the bridge when the Banjo is not in use, or in carrying it from place to place.

It is better also to keep the bridge in one stationary position upon the head, with the strings always in the proper notches and kept up to pitch. The notches in the bridge will not wear so soon if this is done, and the bridge will not so readily shift out of position during a performance upon the instrument. The stiff leather cases, in use by all good banjoists of the present day, are sufficient

protection to the bridge and head, and it is entirely unnecessary to remove, or let down, the bridge.

Always see to it that both feet of the bridge rest perfectly flat upon the banjo-head—that is, perfectly level, so that the pressure has an equal bearing “all around.” You will find that if the bridge is drawn over, obliquely, by the pull exerted upon it by the strings, in tuning, so that only a portion of the feet of the bridge rest upon the head, the tone is greatly weakened; and besides, the bridge under such conditions is ready to fall over or break very easily.

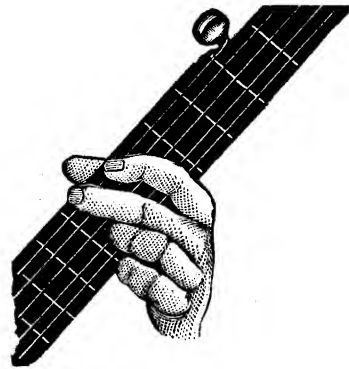
### AVAILABLE KEYS.—FINGERING THE FIFTH, OR SHORT STRING.

There is more banjo music written in the keys of “A” and “E” than in all the other keys combined. One reason for this is that the “thumb string,” or short E string, can be used in these keys to a greater extent than in any other; E, being the dominant note of A, and the tonic note in the key of E, of course. Thus these two keys are easier to play in than perhaps any other. Some years ago we had many,—then considered good players,—who could not play very much outside of these two keys. If they undertook to play a Waltz or March that began in the key of A, for instance, and modulated into the flat keys, they would transpose the portions of the piece that happened to come into the more difficult keys, into the same key the piece started in, or its dominant. This would be considered an awful musical botch at the present time, but years ago it was done, and a great many banjo players did not know the difference.

The key of A is doubtless the most available key of the Banjo, and a great many fine musical effects can be brought within the range of the Banjo in that key. The key of E is particularly available when the “bass string” is raised a tone higher than in the ordinary way of tuning,—called “Bass to B,” in banjo phraseology. The short string (5th string) may be fingered the way Banjos are to-day manufactured, but years ago it would have been a difficult matter to have gotten any other than the one note from that string; for it was not unusual to see the nut for the fifth string placed at the 6th or 7th fret, instead of directly at the 5th fret where it rightly belonged. When the fifth string nut is directly at the 5th fret, any note that can be produced on the first string, can also be produced on the fifth string at precisely the same fret. Thus we are able to produce certain musical effects, by placing the third finger on the desired fret, on the first

string, and covering the same fret, at the same time, on the fifth string, with the second finger, we give the note a double power by using the combined force of two strings at the same time for one note. By playing the strings thus in rapid succession we are able to produce some very nice effects in certain variations, on melodies like the “Carnival of Venice,” and such pieces.

The following illustration shows the position of the fingers of the left hand in stopping the first and fifth strings; as must be done in playing the variation composing the next musical example.



The following example is a variation on the “Carnival of Venice,” in which the fifth string is fingered. The movement is executed entirely upon the first and fifth strings. The *third* finger of left hand is used for stopping the frets on first string, and the *second* finger for the notes made at same frets, on the fifth string. All the notes intended for the fifth string are designated by the extra stem. This variation may, of course, be greatly elaborated upon and embellished; but is here given in its most simple form. Unless the first and fifth strings are perfectly true in tone, there is no use in attempting the variation. It will be understood that although the notes made at the same frets on both the first and fifth strings are precisely the same, yet the quality of tone is different, by reason of one string being longer than the other, and hence, a peculiar musical effect is possible in using the notes as here given.

As already remarked, unless the fifth string nut, or post, is directly at the 5th fret, where it rightly belongs, this movement should not be undertaken, as the notes on that string will not harmonize with those on the first string.



## ON THE MINOR KEYS, Etc.

Perhaps nothing is more puzzling to the beginner on the Banjo, who has not a practical knowledge of music, than the minor scales and keys. In fact, the minor keys are often puzzling as well to the amateur musician who may consider himself far advanced in his art.

Each of the twelve major keys has its relative minor key—thus making twenty-four keys commonly used in music. Starting with the key of C natural, (the natural key, which has neither flats nor sharps) its relative minor key is A. Now, there are two distinct methods of constructing the minor scales, but the major scales are always written in one and the same way.

For the practice of the scale, what is termed the *Melodic Minor Scale* is used, because this scale is more melodious and pleasing to the ear than the other, termed the *Harmonic Minor*; but in writing chords and harmony in the minor keys we use the Harmonic Minor mode, because the Melodic Minor scale has no harmony peculiar to

itself, and necessitates a departure from the key. Those who wish to make a study of Harmony are advised to secure a copy of *Baker's Theoretical and Practical Harmony*, which is published by the Oliver Ditson Co., of Boston, Mass.

The Melodic Minor scale it will be seen from the following example, is different ascending and descending. (The third note in each of different modes is, and must be, a semitone lower than if the scale is a major scale.) In the Melodic Minor scale the sixth and seventh notes are sharpened in ascending, and restored in descending; giving the scale a peculiar effect.

In the Harmonic Minor scale the seventh note only is sharpened, as in all scales, both major and minor, the interval from the seventh note to the octave must be a semitone. This construction of the Harmonic Minor scale gives us an interval of a tone and a half from the sixth to the seventh tones of the scale, and hence the scale itself is not pleasing to the ear.

## SCALE OF A MINOR.

No. 1.

(MELODIC.)



## SCALE OF A MINOR.

No. 2.

(HARMONIC.)



The pupil should understand that in all the different major and minor keys the notes, or tones, are relatively the same: That is, if we transpose the key of C major to D major, every note in the scale of D must be a tone higher than the notes in the scale of C, and the same in all the other keys and scales. Thus if the Banjo is so tuned that the scale of A major on it corresponds to the scale of C major on the piano, the Banjo is tuned a minor third higher than its notation calls for—except that it really sounds an octave below the notes we give to it on the staff. If we have two pianos and one of them is a full tone higher than the other in pitch, the key of C on the higher will correspond with the key of D on the lower, and to play the two instruments together it would be necessary to play each in a different key. If we have a Banjo of the ordinary size, and a Banjo of, say, two-third size, and wish to play them together in harmony, it is necessary to pitch the smaller instrument a fourth or a fifth higher than the larger instrument, and to play the larger in a key a fourth or a fifth higher than the smaller instrument is played in, in order to have both instruments in the same key, actually.

Different sized instruments are thus made to harmonize and some beautiful effects may be obtained through

such combinations, which have been explained in "*The Banjo Philosophically*," and in the book called, "*The Banjo*."

In using a Piccolo Banjo with the large Banjo, it is not necessary to write the music in different keys for the two instruments, because the difference in the pitch of them is a full octave, and therefore the tones of the Piccolo are the same as the large Banjo, only an octave higher.

The following Exercise embraces the different styles of Banjo playing, as follows: The *tremolo* on one string with thumb accompaniment, found in the first three measures:—the tremolo on three and four strings, without the thumb notes, as found in the third measure: Full three finger chord picking, found in the second strain, and single note execution, as found in the last strain. The slur used to designate the "snap," in the last strain of the Exercise, may be passed without notice, if the pupil prefers to execute the passages without making use of the "snap."

The entire exercise should be performed with taste and expression.

### EXERCISE IN A MINOR.

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EXERCISE IN A MINOR.

8\* 4\* 5\* 4\* 3\* 1\*

*p*

1\* 8\* 5\* 4\* 3\*

*mf* *p*

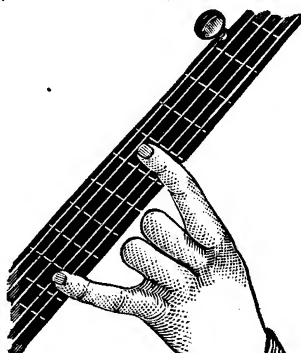
4\* 3\* 1\* 10\* 4\* 1 8\* 5\* 3

*rit.*

1 2

*mf* *rit.*

The two following Exercises, are excellent for the suppling of the fingers of left-hand, and also contain excellent practice for the right hand fingers. The following wood engraving shows the position of the left hand in making the notes called for in the passage marked "9\*,"



Exercise No. 1, is in the key of F $\sharp$  major, having six sharps. Exercise No. 2, is in the key of D major, having two sharps.

### EXERCISE No. 1.

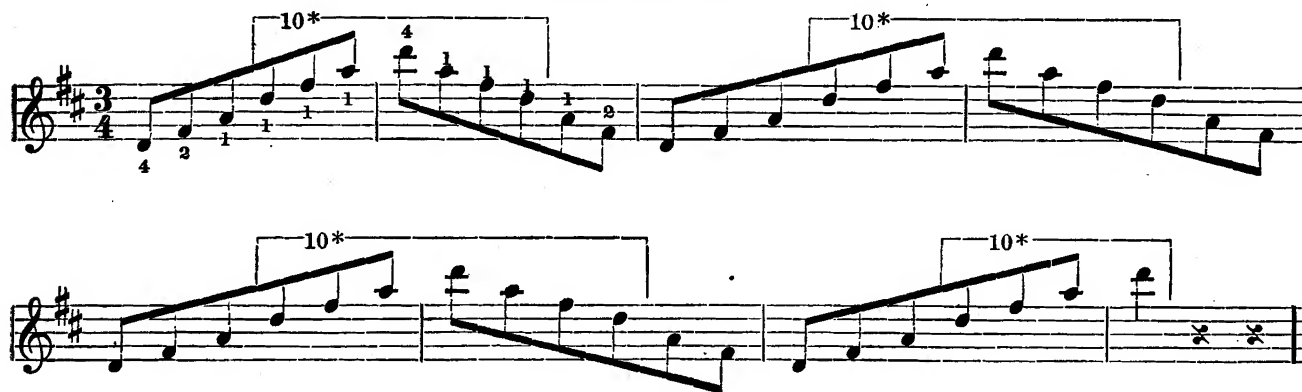
## OBSERVATIONS ON THE BANJO AND BANJO PLAYING--Concluded

By S. S. STEWART

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## EXERCISE No. 2.



The following variation on the well-known melody, the "Blue Bells of Scotland," is most excellent practice for the thumb of the right hand. The *accented* notes are picked with the second finger, and should be well accented. All the notes marked thus, x, are picked with the thumb.


## BLUE BELLS OF SCOTLAND.

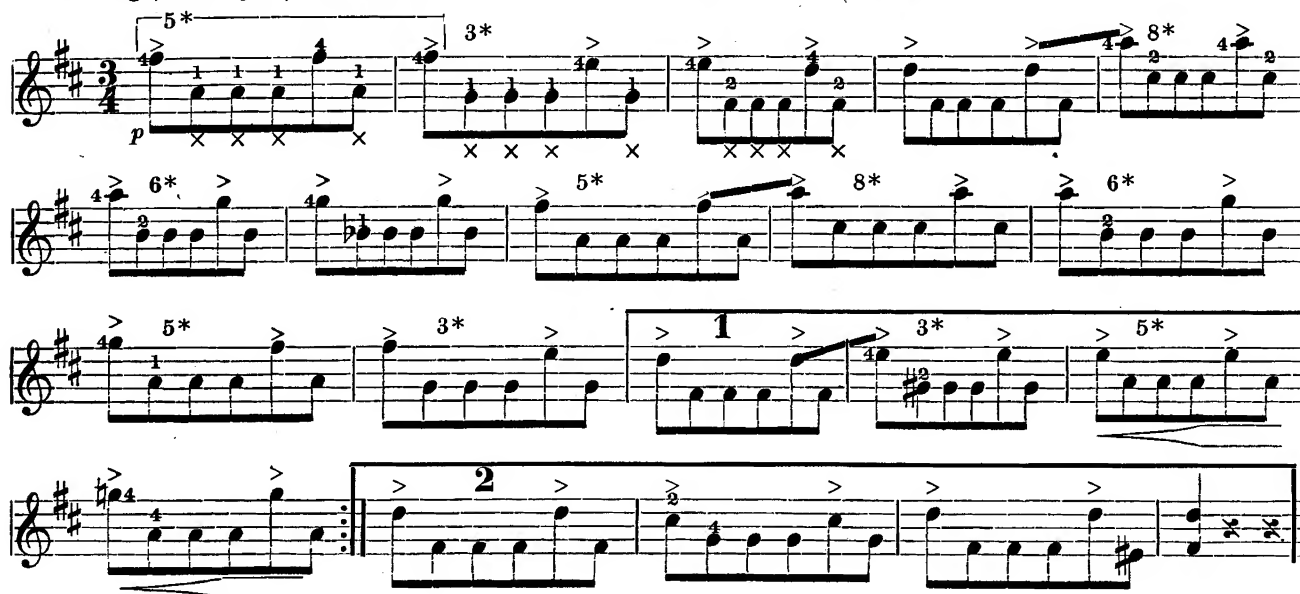
Bass to B.



The following is an extract from the "Phantasmagoria Waltz;" it is a peculiar movement, and is executed, so far as the right hand fingering is concerned, very much like the variation on the "Blue Bells of Scotland;" the picking being done with the second finger and thumb. The accent should fall upon the 1st and 3d counts in each measure. The sign, x, is used to designate the thumb—the notes thus marked being picked with the thumb. As

the movement throughout is the same, it is thought necessary to mark the thumb notes in the first three measures only, in this example.

The sign, thus: , indicates a slide, or shift of the finger from one note to another.



Now we have another Example in the *tremolo* movement: This time it is "Home, Sweet Home," in the key of D. Those who have grown weary of the melody in the old-fashioned "key of A" will now see what satisfaction can be gotten out of it in a new key.

### HOME, SWEET HOME.



## NOTATION AND PITCH.

In music, as in every thing else, a little knowledge is often a dangerous thing. Quite often those who know the least assume to be the wisest. Thus, often we find those who having taken up the Banjo, and possessing very little practical musical knowledge, at once set about to "revolutionize" the instrument and its musical notation. The most blatant subjects belonging to this class are found among the English banjo players, although we have typical representatives on this side of the Atlantic as well. From the time the American banjoist introduced the Banjo into England, the English banjoist has been at work showing us how banjo music should be written.

"Music should never have been written for the Banjo in the keys of A and E," says the English banjoist.—"It is all wrong. Here you are, playing in the key of C with the piano, and reading the notes in A. It's all wrong, I tell you, to play in one key and read in another. Why don't the American publisher change his music?—destroy all the plates and printed copies in America, and *get up new plates and print new editions in the keys the Banjo is tuned in?*"

And so wags the tongue of the banjo enthusiast, who possesses more volubility than knowledge, and like the empty vessel, "maketh a great sound." Yet, the self same person will take a Banjo and go boldly upon the stage,—tune the banjo in the pitch of B $\sharp$ , with the piano, and "thump" out a March in the key of B $\sharp$ , whilst *his music is written for his English Banjo in the key of C*. He never thinks of changing his music to B $\sharp$ , when he tunes in that key; nor did such an idea ever enter his slow thinking brain:—only he wants some one else to change something,—he wants something;—he doesn't know exactly what;—but he wants to *talk*, anyhow, and he wants to publish his music in the way that suits him, whether it is practical or not;—and possessing only the veriest smattering of a knowledge of the Banjo, he "goes at it blindly," and gets all muddled up in his ideas. So is it that in England music is being published for the Banjo, which assumes the natural key of C as the "natural key of the Banjo," instead of the key of A, as long established in America; and thus American banjo music and English banjo music are two separate and distinct things, and the one who has been taught to play by the existing English system of musical notation can not read the American music, published for that instrument without first transposing it into another key.

One would naturally have supposed that the Banjo coming from America,—its musical notation having been established in America,—and America being the home of its greatest manufacturers and players,—the American system of noting music for it would have been adopted along with the instrument in England. But such was not the case, and the result is now found in the confusion of two systems of musical notation,—two bases as a foundation, instead of one;—and in the inconvenience the English performer is forced to submit to, by this confliction of keys, and consequent transpositions.

Many times has the writer received letters from exponents of the Banjo in England, complaining that they could not read American banjo music, and wishing to know why it was that our music was not published the same as theirs, assuming C as the natural key of the instrument instead of A. Now there is no precedent whatever to establish any such claim, as has been made, that C should be the basis of the banjo musical notation.

It is true that a great many banjos are so pitched or tuned that the string and note read as A corresponds with the note C, on the piano. It is equally true that smaller banjos are tuned higher and the same note or string corresponds with D on the piano. It is again true that other and larger banjos are tuned lower and the note read as A upon these instruments corresponds with B $\sharp$  on the piano; and at the time the English banjo music first made its appearance more banjos were tuned to the B $\sharp$  pitch than to C. But all this counts for very little. So long as we have a key for a ground work or basis from which to build the notation of the instrument, it makes no real difference whether we call that key A, B, or C; and the basis of this notation having been established already in America as A, and banjo music having been written on that basis, it became an act of the most unwarranted assumption to set up and seek to establish another key as a basis of notation for the instrument in opposition to one already established.

The setting up of the key of C as the natural one for banjo music would have been justifiable if no other key had already been established; but in the face of what had already been done by such writers as Frank B. Converse, and others,—ignoring the system of prominent American writers and performers,—was an act of jugglery, fostered by short-sighted individuals and had but a single excuse, namely this: The teachers were not familiar with musical notation and sought to avoid having to explain the *sharps, flats and naturals* to pupils, and hence singled out the natural key of C as a favorite one for teaching in—supposing that most of their pupils would not go any further than a few simple tunes in that key, when they would consider their banjo education finished.

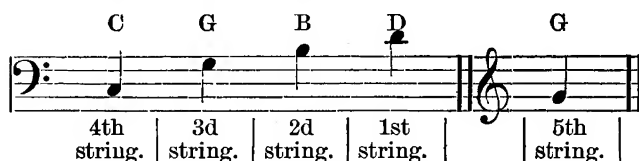
Teachers here in America have often complained that the keys of A and E, with their three and four sharps were difficult to start a pupil in who was not familiar with the rudiments of music, and have expressed a regret that C had not originally been selected in place of A, as the natural key; but none of them have ever gone so far as to think of undertaking a complete change of an established system. The real mistake is in setting pupils to work at the banjo before they have acquired a knowledge of the rudiments of music, and when those ignorant of musical principles are taken as banjo pupils, putting them right at banjo picking without any ground work to start on.

What is really needed is a greater cultivation of the study of musical principles—a better grounding in keys, scales, etc.,—before the pupil sets out to become a performer. The teacher who merely thinks of getting so much money from an aspiring pupil in exchange for showing how to pick the strings in the execution of few tunes, is not the one to establish a system of banjo playing; nor will such teachers ever rise beyond the level they have chosen for themselves.

There would be just as much sense in the Guitarist who makes a practice of tuning his guitar a half tone flat, changing the notation of his instrument on that account, as to change the notation of Banjo music from A to C, because the A of the Banjo is tuned to C of the piano. Even if the change spoken of were made, neither the Banjo or Guitar would be perfectly true to its notation, for each of those instruments sound an octave lower than the notes indicate, and to bring the musical notation absolutely correct it would have to be written partly in the *bass clef*. But some of our banjoists know about as much of the "Bass Clef," as they know of their great-grandfather's grandfather.

### "CONCERT PITCH."

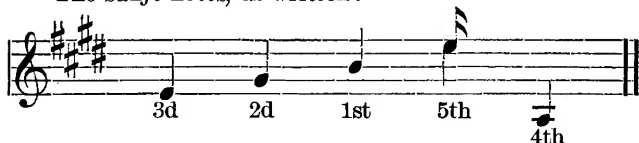
Nearly all the banjo players of the day, in performing with piano accompaniment, and in tuning to play with Guitar, Mandolin, Violin, Flute and other instruments, pitch their banjos in "C." That is, it is now customary to tune the fourth or bass string of the Banjo to the note C; and consequently when the Banjo is played in the key of A, according to its musical notation, the piano and other instruments play in the key of C. The Banjo being pitched thus, the five strings of the instrument correspond to the following notes of the piano.



The above represents the actual notes produced by the five open strings of the Banjo, when tuned to play with piano or organ; and music now published for banjo and piano, in the form of duets, is arranged to suit this tuning. The reading of the notes on the Banjo, will in no wise be changed,—no matter in what pitch the banjo may be tuned; so there is no occasion for the pupil to be perplexed or mystified on account the seeming difference in the actual pitch of the notes on the piano, and the printed notes in his banjo music.

First tune the fourth (bass) string of the Banjo to C, with the piano, and then tune the remaining strings just as you would without the piano. After tuning, try the strings with the notes of the piano, as follows, and see that you are well in tune before beginning to play.

The banjo notes, as written:—



Correspond with, on the piano:—



In tuning the Banjo with guitar, let the guitarist first tune his guitar to concert pitch, and then tune the *third* string of the Banjo, the same as the third, or G string, of the guitar. Or, tune the bass string of the Banjo to the

note C, found on the fifth string of the guitar at the *third* fret.

To tune the Banjo to play with the mandolin or the violin, tune the *third* string of Banjo to the fourth string (G) of the mandolin or violin.

As has been said, the key of "A" on the Banjo will correspond with the key of C on the piano, organ, mandolin, guitar and violin. Any other key will, of course, be subject to the same rule—no change of this tuning pitch being required in any case. Thus, the key of "E," on the Banjo, will correspond with G on those instruments; the key of "D," on the Banjo, with F on the other instruments; the key of "C" on the Banjo, with E $\flat$ ; the key of "A minor," with C minor; the key of "F $\sharp$  minor," with A minor; and so on.

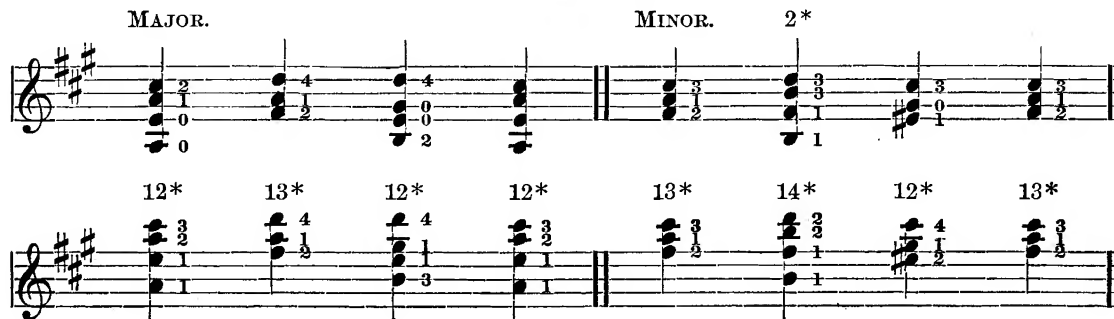
Some banjos—smaller ones—require tuning to a consequently higher pitch; and others—extra large ones—to a lower pitch, of course; and such instruments do not come within the rule laid down above for tuning. But the pitch, as given, suits the great majority of Banjos now being manufactured, and as it would not be a paying business to go to the expense of publishing music for the Banjo, with piano parts in more than one key, the "C" pitch has been adopted as the most appropriate and practicable.

For the method of tuning and arranging Banjos of various sizes, to be used in orchestral combinations, together with guitars, mandolins and other instruments, the reader is referred to an excellent treatise on that subject, entitled "*Hints to Arrangers and Leaders of Banjo Clubs*," by Thomas J. Armstrong, which is published by the writer of these articles.

### READING IN "THE POSITIONS."

In learning to read notes in the "positions," on the banjo, it should be impressed upon the mind of the pupil that the four strings are divided exactly by the 12th fret, and as previously explained, the notes on any of those strings, from the 12th fret upwards, will be an octave higher than in counting from the nut upwards. The fifth string, of course, if fingered, will not come within this rule; as it begins only at the 5th fret. The 17th fret, therefore, will produce the octave of this string.

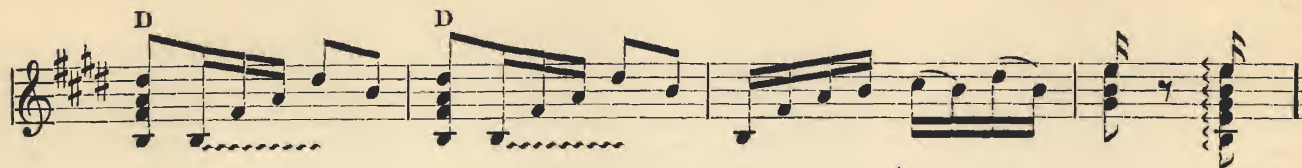
The following simple chords are given, first in the lower position, and then an octave higher. By practicing them a few times, as written, the pupil will get the idea correctly in mind of the dividing line—or 12th fret.











The chords marked D are the "drum chords." The triplet and succeeding note form the "roll," as explained. Marks like this  $\wedge$ , are marks of expression, signifying a strong accent to be given such notes or double notes. The waved line, thus:  $\sim$ , indicates the roll, which in drum chords is made, as explained, in this department, by the opening of the fingers over the strings. In thimble playing such a sign would indicate the sliding of the thimble over the strings.

The waved line that appears in connection with the last chord in the example, simply indicates an arpeggio chord, as explained on page 24 of the *American School*,—one note to follow another in the regular "picking" style with thumb and three fingers.

It is necessary, of course, to perform the notes in the roll, including the drum chord, in perfect time, which the pupil will not be able to accomplish with good effect until he has, by practice, suppld and strengthened the fingers and so educated them, as it were, to the work.

A very good method for doing this is to practice the movement of the hand upon a table, or upon any flat surface within easy access, until the movement is easily and accurately accomplished.

### MUSICAL EXPRESSION.

It is not unusual to meet with banjo players—and even with teachers—who will declare that slow movements are not suitable for the Banjo at all, and that they never attempt to play anything "slow," or in the case of teachers, that they give any "slow movements" to pupils, as the pupils will not tolerate such lessons, wishing to learn only music that is quick and lively. Hence, we have many banjo players who, in the way of playing a few jigs, polkas, schottisches or marches, may be entitled to the name of "banjoist," and yet who are very far from being musicians and artists. Up to within a very few years ago banjo music had not become developed to that extent that made slow movements a feature of banjo playing, and players of the class alluded to could get along very well with a small stock of lively airs—and selections, some of which were a mere "jingle," and far from being worthy of the name of musical compositions. But art in the Banjo line is advancing—what would have passed muster ten or twenty years ago, as banjo music, will not hold to-day; for now musicians of culture listen to the Banjo, and many have taken it up. The lights and shades of music on the Banjo can no more be passed by to-day, than can the "simple method" fakir of a few years ago, find recognition as a banjo artist in the concert room or musical soiree. When we gaze upon a painting—the work of a great artist—we do not see all bright colors, without shade—or all dark colors,—but the combination of all, and each in its proper place.

It is this bringing of the lights and shades into music that gives it *expression*. and it is the *artist* who expresses himself in his music. The mere botch can perhaps run through a difficult musical composition and play the notes or chords mechanically, as written; but the musical artist enters into affinity with the composition he performs, and coming thoroughly *en rapport* with the music, produces

altogether a different rendition of the same composition.

There is no use, nowadays, in a person picking up a banjo and thumping upon it with all his might in a vain attempt to out do the piano player—or guitar player—who is accompanying him, if he wishes to be classed as a banjo artist. Musical art links itself not with pugilistic encounters or with feats of hard punching of boxing bags. Every thing is good in its proper place, else it would not exist. And the "banjo slugger" will exist in his proper place, perhaps, until, at least, he has learned better, and advanced out of that sphere; but he can have no place in musical art. But, not to further digress, let me say a few words to the teacher and pupil of the Banjo, upon *expression in banjo music*.

The signs *f*, *ff*, *p*, and *pp*, when placed in music mean something. They are not to be overlooked or passed by as mere accidents of the composer, or as if they had merely dropped into the plate by some strange mistake of the printer. The sign, *f*, meaning *forte*, loud, should be observed; just as its opposite, *p*, meaning *piano*, soft, should be observed. *mf*, signifying, more loud, or more tone, means that the volume of tone should at that place be increased. When the word *dolce*, appears at the beginning of a composition, it means that it is to be sweetly played; but the extent of the sweetness imparted to it depends upon the nature and ability of the performer, of course.

To attempt a review of the various signs and terms used in music does not come within the scope of the present article, but there are many excellent musical works published, from which a thorough knowledge of this subject may be obtained, the most complete of which is believed to be "Stainer and Barretts' Dictionary of Musical Terms," published by Oliver Ditson Co.

It is sometimes customary with the soloist to give his own interpretation to the composition he plays, and to have an accompanist who is gifted in the art of "following," as it is termed, so that the various signs placed in the music are not strictly followed,—the accompanist having the music before him, but taking care to follow the soloist accurately, and to give his interpretation of the music, rather than that of the composer. I am not prepared to say that this is not correct, so far as it applies to such cases; but it will not answer for orchestral playing, for if each performer in a banjo club should give his own ideas full scope what a sorry mixture the combination would be likely to produce can be imagined from what some of us have already heard.

Therefore, I say, to the teacher—instruct your pupils to follow the marks of expression found in the musical compositions you are teaching them. To the pupil, I say, study the marks of expression found in the music, as well as the notes. There is no use in playing *tremolo* music on the banjo unless you give the music proper expression. In listening to an oration from a public speaker you do not hear him deliver his words and sentences like a machine, or as though he were wound up, to go along in a purely mechanical manner—all the words having the same emphasis; but on the other hand, you perceive that he makes use of the signs *p*, *f*, and *ff*, where he becomes enthused upon his subject, and when some particularly



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striking point is reached. And just so in music does the composer endeavor to make a distinction in the relative force of certain musical sentences, so to speak. But as no two orators deliver an oration in precisely the same way, perchance no two musical artists may place the same stress upon the same musical passage,—this being a matter of individuality, after a certain point. But until the pupil has arrived at a point where he can with safety place himself upon a level with his teacher, or the composer whose music he plays, he had better content himself with following the marks and signs of expression given to the music by the composer thereof.

There are some performers and writers, who take great liberties with the music of composers of standing. Sometimes, in writing variations for the Banjo, on a certain melody, they will depart far from the original, in order, as they suppose, to give it a better harmony. When the melody has got to be changed in order to produce cer-

tain desired effects in *harmony*, a liberty has been taken with the work of another that evidently was never intended by the composer. Again, we find enthusiastic banjo players frequently changing a standard melody for the sake of producing what appears to them an improved musical effect, or perhaps to give expression to a certain part of it. In such cases, I should again observe that undue liberties have been taken with the composition, and if the arranger has to resort to such doubtful expedients, he had better leave the melody to itself and set about composing something of his own, where full scope can be given to his peculiar ideas on harmony. The introduction of modulations into a musical composition merely for the sake of modulating, is not in good taste, and pieces so arranged are fit only for exercises.

The following melody, in chords, will be found of use as an exercise and amusement for the student.

The exercise consists of four staves of music in G major, written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music is composed of chords. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 above the notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *mf* (mezzo-forte), and *dim.* (diminuendo). Specific chords are marked with asterisks: 5\*, 3\*, 2\*, 5\*, 7\*, 13\*, 10\*, 5\*, 8\*, 5\*, 6\*, 7\*, 3\*, and 3\*.

In the following Exercise in G major, the double notes are made entirely upon the third and fourth strings. In denoting the "positions," the rule previously laid down has been followed—that is, the first finger of left hand establishes the position; and when the first finger is not used to stop a string in any of the chords, the fret at which that finger would fall naturally, is taken as estab-

lishing the position. The fingering for left hand, as denoted, is given with a view to retaining the musical effect of the shift; as the hand glides from one position to another, as the exercise is intended to be performed *legato*, or in a connected manner.

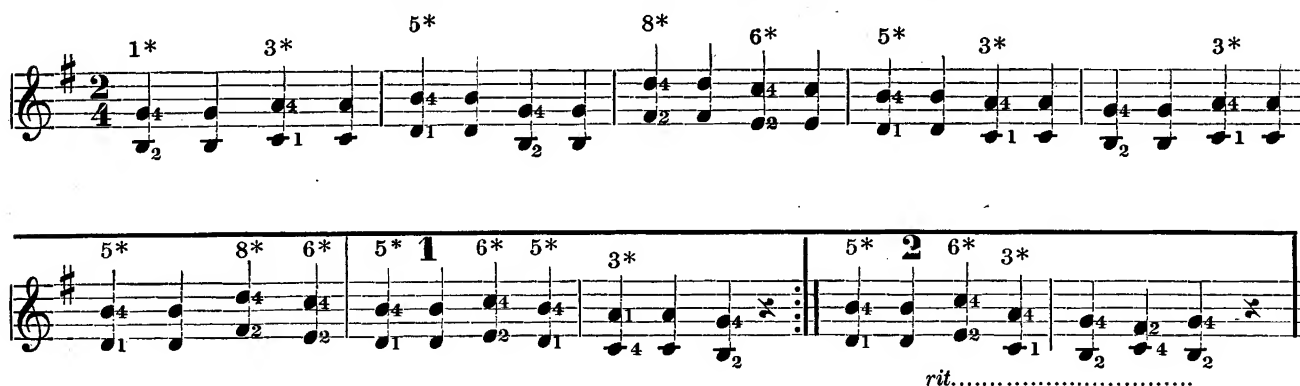
The right hand work may be done entirely with the thumb, if desired, in playing the exercise.

#### SCALE OF G MAJOR.

The scale is written in G major (one sharp, F#). The first staff shows the ascending scale: G4 (4), A4 (1), B4 (0), C5 (1), D5 (4), E5 (0), F#5 (1), G5 (2). The second staff shows the descending scale: G5 (2), F#5 (1), E5 (0), D5 (4), C5 (1), B4 (0), A4 (1), G4 (4).

## EXERCISE.—“DOUBLE STOPS” IN G.

(Played entirely upon the third and fourth strings.)



*Note.*—The left hand positions, under Mr. Converse's method of noting, would be somewhat different from those marked in the example: for instance, in the third measure, that marked "8\*" would, under Mr. Converse's plan, be called 9\*, because the *lowest stopped note* is found at the 9th fret; that marked "6\*," would be called 7\* for the same reason, and so on. Here we establish our "position" from the fret at which the *first finger* is placed, and Converse's method, establishes the position from the *lowest stopped note* in any chord. This difference in designating positions is of no great importance to the skilled performer, as he can judge of the *position* from the notes before him, but it is important for the student to observe.

In an example like the foregoing, where the chords,

or double notes, may be made on the banjo in two or more positions, it is a specially important matter that the "positions" intended by the composer or arranger should be intelligible to the performer, for if played in other positions than intended a very different musical effect may be imparted.

As an example of expressive banjo music, the writer knows of nothing superior to the following; for simplicity and purity it can not be surpassed.

The melody is an old one, it is true, but has never before been used as a Banjo subject. It is called "*Eva to Her Papa*," by G. C. Howard, of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" fame, and is used by the permission of Oliver Ditson Company, owners of the copyright.



**EMBELLISHMENTS.—GRACE NOTES.**

The introduction of grace notes, or embellishments, into banjo music is often productive of good effect; but when overdone the reverse is apt to be the case. Sometimes we find passages in a good musical composition so overdone with embellishments, that it is better for the pupil to entirely omit the "graces" in practicing the selection, in order to avoid being overwhelmed in confusion. Often the over-embellishment of banjo music keeps the fingers of the player busy to such an extent that one does not know but that he is troubled with some nervous affection,—the fingers not having time to settle long enough upon the notes forming the melody, proper, to insure their impression upon the ear,—and the fingers twitching about, in attempting to get the grace notes all in in good time, is not a desirable addition to the performance.

The grace note as introduced in the following example produces a very nice effect.



Again, in the following example, we have another kind of grace note embellishment, that is also appropriate.



Example No. 5 presents the same passage over-embellished, but not more so than some of the banjo music now offered for sale.

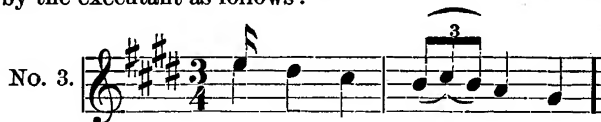


The over-embellishment of music is an extreme to which some writers must go—just as some people run into extremes in other things; but for the majority of musical compositions we think the fewer grace notes that are used the better,—both for the music and the performer.

**THE SIX STRING BANJO.**

There are two separate and distinct kinds of six string Banjos; the one is strung, tuned and played precisely like a Guitar,—the other precisely like the ordinary five string Banjo, with this difference:—the neck is made a little wider and there is an additional peg set in the centre of the scroll, so as to make five pegs in the peg-head instead of four. The extra peg is used for the fourth string, (the regulation bass string) whilst the peg that usually holds this string is used for the extra bass string. The five string Banjo with the additional bass string, then, becomes the six string Banjo. The short string remains, to be used, or not, as occasion may require. The extra bass string is tuned a fifth—or sometimes a fourth—below the fourth string, or ordinary bass string.

The foregoing (No. 2) example would be expressed by the executant as follows:



There are two kinds of grace notes used to embellish music—the long and the short; called in musical parlance by the tongue-twisting name of the "long and short appoggiatura."

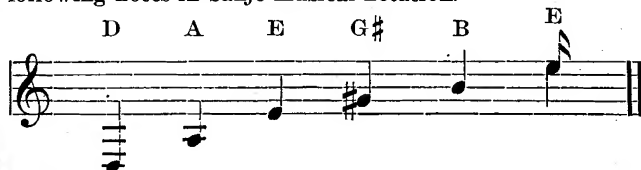
The short grace note is usually written thus, ♯, and borrows very little time from the note that follows it. In fact, there is no rule for deciding the exact time to be given to the short grace note, and it may be omitted from the performance altogether if desired.

With the long grace note it is different—as will be seen by comparing Example No. 1, as written, with Example No. 2, as played.

It is a matter that has never been clearly explained to the writer, as to why the long appoggiatura was ever devised and used in music. The same passages could be more clearly expressed in notes of the usual size and value, but the "long grace note" seems to remain as one of the impediments to the successful study of music, by many amateurs.

The Example No. 4 is given to display a passage having slight embellishment by the employment of the short grace note.

Hence, the six strings of this Banjo correspond to the following notes in banjo musical notation.



For convenience sake, and to avoid confusion in terms, we designate the second bass string the *sixth string*, as the short string is so generally recognized as the fifth string.

The six string Banjo is of very great advantage in playing duets, or in combinations of Banjos. As an instrument of accompaniment it is far superior to the five string Banjo, and its use for this purpose in conjunction with the five string Banjo forms an excellent musical combination. The addition of the extra bass string gives the performer the fundamental note of many chords in which this note is lacking on the five string instrument, while the harmony is, of course, much richer and more

powerful. The writer does not admire the six string Banjo as a solo instrument for all "around playing," not thinking it as brilliant for this purpose as the five string instrument,—the extra bass string seeming to lessen the power of the higher notes,—but for the purpose of playing an accompaniment to the solo on the five string Banjo or Banjeaurine, or upon the Mandolin, the six string Banjo is vastly superior to the five string Banjo, or the guitar.

A good six string Banjo costs from thirty dollars upwards. Those who play the "second banjo" parts in Banjo Clubs would do well to adopt the six string Banjo, as it does not require much time to acquire facility in the use of the same and the music produced is far superior to that of the five string Banjo for the same purpose.

In the *Eclectic Banjo School*, part second, by John H. Lee, will be found full instruction for playing accompaniments on the six string Banjo, together with a complete set of chords for the instrument. The late Mr. Lee was a firm believer in this instrument and a warm advocate of its use for the purpose I have named, and his accompaniments to the banjo solos of Mr. W. A. Huntley, will long be remembered with pleasure by those who were so fortunate as to have heard those gentlemen perform in concert.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS.

Not only is a knowledge of notes and of musical notation necessary to the banjoist of the day, but also a practical knowledge of the mechanical principles of his instrument. He should know when his Banjo is properly equipped—should know when it has a good and proper head upon it—should be able to rightly judge of this, and must know when it is rightly and properly strung; and should fully understand how to regulate his instruments and maintain them in proper condition for the use required, and be prepared for all exigencies.

When we come to consider that the best instrument possible to construct in the shape of a Banjo may be rendered very inferior by having an inferior or unsuitable head upon it, or one that is improperly put on and adjusted,—or the bad influence of improper strings, we perceive the necessity of understanding the matter of properly *Heading* and *Stringing* the instrument. It is well, at the same time, to bear in mind that a Banjo that is not otherwise properly constructed can not possibly be transformed into a perfect instrument by changing the head or strings, although it is quite often the case that a poor instrument is improved to a greater or less extent by so doing.

A good workman should understand the tools or machine with which he operates, otherwise he cannot of himself keep them in good working condition. The cyclist who travels over long distances must understand the mechanical construction of the machine that carries him, or he is likely to be detained some time or other by his machine getting out of working order, and leaving him in the lurch, to continue his journey on foot.

The horseman must understand his animal, if he rides and depends upon the faithful horse to carry him—otherwise he too is likely to be "left" some day, through complete dependence upon his groom. In fact, the artist or artisan who understands the implements with which he works is always better off than the mere mechanical workman who proceeds, as it were, in an automaton like manner—doing only that which he has acquired by the constant repetition daily of one thing only—and that mechanically.

It is not by any means meant to infer that a banjoist must understand fully all the details of the manufacture of banjos, but that he should have a practical knowledge of the instrument as it is constructed, and that this knowledge does not require any very great amount of

time or study to acquire and will greatly assist him in his performances, by aiding him in keeping his instruments in the best playing condition. This alone will give him an advantage over those performers who possess merely a superficial knowledge of picking the strings. Therefore it is hoped that the remarks contained in these articles will be welcome to the banjo student of the day, for he will find here, what he can find no where else,—the necessary instruction in this branch.

How often it happens that a learner will take or send his banjo to the manufacturer, complaining that the frets in some of the upper positions are *false*,—or have suddenly gotten false,—from say the 7th fret upwards; when, had he possessed the information given in this work, he would have known that it was simply impossible for the fretting to have become false of itself, after once having been true. Possessing the information given in these articles he would naturally look first to the position of the *bridge* upon the head of the instrument, and then to the strings. But there are many amateurs to-day, posing as banjoists, who do not know any thing about the proper position of the bridge—or how to ascertain the exact place it should rest upon the head, by calculating from the 12th fret,—and they therefore depend upon the mark which has been placed upon the head by the manufacturer, and which is liable to become effaced, or slightly changed in position, in the stretching of the head.

Again, many an amateur does not know when a false string is on his instrument—or if he has one, two or more strings that are false, and must therefore be more or less annoyed in practice or performing—and as is frequently the case,—becomes, for the time being, discouraged and lays the Banjo aside for a while, when for lack of a little knowledge he loses time and meets with a possible setback to acquiring a desirable mastery of the instrument. For these reasons, as stated, I have included in this work a few observations upon the instrument that I think cannot but be of practical service to the banjo student—the teacher and the performer.

Practice is absolutely necessary to the banjo student who aims to acquire skill in execution. Strength and suppleness of the fingers are essential to success in a brilliant execution; as for this, dexterity of fingering must be coupled with musical knowledge. An hour's daily practice—or even a half hour, providing the right things are practiced—is sufficient to keep the fingers of the amateur in good condition for work. We have performers to-day, who by constant practice, and concentrated energy have advanced as executants far beyond what was deemed possible a few years ago. It is no doubt possible,—by concentrating the mind constantly upon the work and practicing the greater part of the time,—for some persons to become almost wonderful performers upon the instrument; but whether it is well,—or a good thing,—to devote all one's time, or the greater part of one's life to this one thing is a question. It is hardly possible that the true aim of life consists of becoming a sort of "musical block-head,"—only fit for one thing; but there is little doubt that a fair amount of banjo playing and musical study may become, not only a source of pleasant amusement and recreation, but also an educator and developer of the mind,—and the Banjo itself a companion and friend in many otherwise weary hours, and a cheering and enlivening companion after protracted work in other directions.

With this observation I will draw my "Observations" to a close, wishing that all who peruse these remarks and practice the musical examples included herein, may meet with the fulfillment of their fullest musical aspirations, and hoping that inspiration may enable some of them, at least, to add in the future to the stock of information I have been enabled to give.